Knowledge before printing and after

The Indian tradition in changing Kerala

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[1] See English bibliography, Nitya Tripta, 1963.

[2] See page 23 and English bibliography, Nitya Tripta, 1963.

Note on Transliteration

The Malayalam alphabet includes the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and also some additional letters.

A standard scheme of transliteration (taken from Zimmer, H., *Philosophies of India*, Pantheon, New York, 1953) has been used for the Sanskrit letters:

Consonants							
Gutturals	k	kh	g	gh	ṅ		
Palatals	c	ch	j	jh	ñ	y	ś
Linguals	ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ	r	ṣ
Dentals	t	th	d	dh	n	l	s
Labials	p	ph	b	bh	m	v	
Aspirate	h						
Visarga	ḥ						
Anusvara	ṁ						

Vowels a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ, e, ai, o, au

The additional letters in the Malayalam script are transliterated as follows:

Consonants
- ḷ is retroflex l
- ṟ is a retroflex r pronounced with the tongue curled back but not touching the palate.
- ŕ is a hard r pronounced with the tongue nearer the teeth than ordinary r.
- t́ is a hard t as in ‘table’.

Vowels
- ē is a long e (pronounced like ‘-ay’ in ‘day’).
- ō is a long o.
- ŭ occurs only at the end of a word and it is a short vowel pronounced like ‘-er’ as in ‘father’, but even shorter and with less emphasis.

When a Sanskrit word is used in Malayalam, the termination changes, in particular ‘-*a*’ becomes ‘-*am*’ or ‘-*an*’ (*maṭha*, *maṭhaṁ*, *Rāma*, *Rāman*); and the transliteration may also change slightly, in particular in the doubling of consonants after r (*sarga*, *sarggaṁ*; *karma*, *karmmaṁ*) and in the vowel emphasis on e, o (*yoga*, *yōgaṁ*). In the introduction, the Sanskrit forms and terminations have been used, since they are more familiar. In chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6, for translations from Malayalam, I found it generally more convenient to use the Malayalam forms. Where a word is already familiar to readers of English, I have used the familiar form without diacriticals. (e.g. Krishna instead of Kṛṣṇa).

For historical records and quotations already in English (Chapters 4, 5 and 7 in particular), the transliteration of the author has been kept, to maintain the historical authenticity of the original.

Introduction

How knowledge was learned in traditional society

Before the widespread use of printing, people lived their lives in what we call 'traditional societies', in the sense that most knowledge and culture came handed down from previous generations, passed on by parents, teachers and older members of the community. This is, of course, not the way things are in the modern world. Most of our knowledge and culture does not come directly from our parents and elders, but from published books, periodicals, newspapers, radio, television, the cinema, and from the extensive contacts modern communications give us with our contemporaries. By contrast, traditional societies had no radio, no cinema, no television. Travel was far more difficult than it is today.

Since there was no printing, there were no newspapers, no periodicals, no mechanically reproduced books. In fact, copies of books were very hard to come by, because they had to be individually written out on parchment or palm leaf or some other such cumbersome material. In India, it was not till the late nineteenth century that printing caught on and that books and periodicals began to be published effectively by Indians. This was perhaps the critical point from which the modernization of Indian society began to take place, but such changes naturally take time to make their impact, and fifty years ago India was still largely traditional except in certain elite areas of big city life. Today modernization is well under way and Indian society is a rapidly changing mixture of traditional and modern elements, with considerable strains and conflicts.

The word 'modernization' has been used in many ways, and therefore I would like to explain what I mean by it here. I use the word to refer to the profound process of cultural transformation which starts with the introduction of printing and goes on to develop the use of printing and subsequent communications media into a major way of organizing knowledge and culture. In little over a hundred years, India has been going through this same process of modernization that has been going on for a period of five hundred years of social and cultural upheaval in Europe and America. Thus, the Indian tradition has had relatively little time to adapt, and can so far only partly have adapted, to what is after all a very radical and rapid change of society. Much of Indian culture has not yet been adapted for presentation to the modern world; and hence, in order to understand the Indian and other similar traditions, it helps to go back a little in history to ask how culture was presented and learned in traditional society.

Without the modern communications on which we depend so much, without even books being freely available, how did people learn things and become educated in traditional society? The basic answer is simple: people learned largely by direct personal contact, and traditional culture was organized so that it could be carried directly from person to person. This gave rise to two main types of traditional culture. One was 'folk culture', the popular culture of traditional civilization, which was passed on without much self-conscious system of instruction, but was picked up instead by habitual association in small communities, like villages and extended families, in which people lived. The other type of culture was 'classical culture', the carefully trained and educated culture of traditional civilization, passed on by teach-

ers, who instructed their pupils in the classic exercises and the classic works on which systems of culture and knowledge were based. Thus, where mass media today transmit popular culture to national and international audiences, the popular culture of traditional society was much more of a small community affair; and educational programmes today use printing and other media to present modern teachers and students with a far greater variety of educational materials than were available to traditional teachers and pupils, who had to depend on the relatively few classic exercises and classic works that could be passed down personally from teacher to pupil and hence from generation to generation.

The necessity to personally carry and pass on culture, with limited communications media, had a profound effect on traditional attitudes. Any culture, whether modern or traditional, is carried through the cultural forms that are used and passed on in society; and by a 'cultural form' I mean anything that has a recognizable shape and a use, as for example a practical form like a tool or a technique, or an intellectual form like a concept or a theory, or an emotional form like an expression of feeling or a symbol of value. What communications media do is to record and transmit such cultural forms, thus making them available to people in society. In the modern world, our sophisticated, extensive communications media enable us to record and transmit an enormous quantity and variety of cultural forms; and hence we have a considerable choice of readily available forms. Moreover, we do not have to worry too much about personally remembering the exact details of the cultural forms that we might use, because we can to a large extent leave it to the media to record and reproduce the correct forms when we need them. In effect, we can largely forget the formal details, and concentrate on understanding and using the forms that are made available to us.

By contrast, in traditional society, where communications media were not so developed, the reproduction and transmission of form had to be much more of a personal matter, and people had to spend much more attention and effort personally ensuring that the details of form were correctly maintained. This meant naturally that relatively few forms could be kept available, and those forms that were available had to be maintained and used more intensively than we are accustomed to today. In sum, traditional culture was organized to be *formal and intensive* in character, where modern culture is *informal and extensive*.

Thus, first of all, it is easy to see why traditional culture developed its attitude of *laborious formality*, making the reproduction of form and formal detail a major, time-consuming activity around which people organized much of their lives and culture. There will shortly be a detailed illustration of this when I describe the traditional system of education; but now I want to point out that even before the start of lessons a child had an intimate background in traditional formality, because every area of life was organized by reproducing the traditional forms: as practical life was regulated by observing the forms of custom and convention, intellectual life was developed by repeating the sayings of folklore and the verses of classic texts, and emotional life was cultivated by performing the ceremonies of society and the rituals of religion.

The second traditional attitude I want to mention is *repetition and concentration*. Since the forms that could be handed on by tradition were relatively few, they had to be used correspondingly more often, and people learned to concentrate on the same few forms over and over again, learning gradually more through successive repetitions. Traditional arts and crafts were based on a repetition of the same few motifs, patterns and themes; traditional stories, in particular stories from epic and religious

legend, were retold so often and so often dramatized in art and artistic performances that the characters and events of these stories were a lifelong, deeply felt part of people's lives; traditional learning, as we shall soon see, depended on repeatedly reciting classic texts; traditional training consisted in a repetition of formal exercises; traditional behaviour and attitudes were regulated by forms of custom and ceremony that had to be observed over and over again; a traditional person's life was organized by the repetition of daily routine, with special periods of time set aside for concentrated study and worship; and, finally, there were special disciplines of mental concentration; in particular ritual and yoga, in which the ability to focus the mind was systematically trained through the repetition of prescribed forms.

The third traditional attitude I want to mention is *obedience and faith*. Since the same few forms were so often repeated, they had to concentrate as much knowledge and culture as possible; and hence traditional forms were not intended to be understood at once, but to achieve results only after they had been obediently performed and faithfully repeated many, many times under the guidance of an experienced teacher. This process clearly required a special spirit of obedience and faith: particularly in classical culture with its special systems of rigorous training, but also in folk culture where accepted forms had to be correctly followed for things to work out in small, tightly-knit communities that threatened to ostracize those who did not conform to the dictates of custom and tradition and traditional elders. In general, both in India and elsewhere in the world, the traditional social order emphasized self-restraint and authority much more than we do today, because improved communications have enabled the modern world to develop and co-ordinate a diversity of individual opportunities spread among many more people than before, thus making it possible for us to emphasize self-expression and freedom much more than traditional society could.

The fourth and final traditional attitude I want to mention is *respect and reverence*. Since traditional forms and traditional elders and teachers had to be followed and obeyed with such faithful effort and attention, they had to be highly respected, as representatives of the concentrated experience and knowledge of tradition. More generally, since traditional society lacked the technological capacity to provide individual opportunity for more than a very few people, it was authoritarian and hierarchical, cultivating an attitude of respect for established forms and for elevated persons, as embodiments of status and value. Respect was cultivated practically by disciplined obedience, symbolically by ceremonial and ritual deference, and personally by ideals of devotion towards elders and superiors who provided direction and support. Religious worship and spiritual devotion were the ultimate expressions of traditional respect, in that religion expressed respect for a spiritual principle of ultimate value represented by the form of a god. Religion was very important in traditional society, and in fact it coloured all of traditional life; because the spiritual values of religion were conceived to underlie everything in existence, and hence some kind of ritual worship and a sense of spiritual reverence were involved in almost all traditional activity. Again, it is worth noting how different this is from the modern world, where instead of respect and reverence we emphasize independence of mind and secularism. Because modern education and communications have widened the spread to individual reason and have brought us more contact with different ways of cultural and spiritual expression, we take the view that people should think for themselves and that religious worship is a matter of individual choice, to be kept out of public and

practical affairs where people of different cultures and spiritual persuasions join together.

Having now discussed the general background of traditional circumstances and attitudes, it is time to look a little more closely at the people of traditional society. How did people pursue learning and become educated in a traditional society?

First of all, there would be the folk culture of one's immediate community of kith and kin, and one would share this folk culture with other communities wherever there was contact and influence. Folk culture was learned and transmitted in the course of community life: either, on the one hand, through immediate personal relationships of neighbourhood, relatives, friends and associates; or, on the other hand, through public ceremonies and festivals that took place in the neighbourhood or that people journeyed to see at a temple or capital city or some other pilgrimage or festival centre. In the course of one's life, one would learn from family and friends the customs and rituals through which affairs were regulated and also the folklore of sayings, stories and songs which explained custom and ritual and gave one something to think and dream about. And, on special occasions, one would gather together with other people for a public ceremony or festival where one would be treated to a dramatic display of imaginative or religious performance and one would learn something of the wider world of which one's everyday life was a part.

This folk culture of personal association and popular display, rich as it could be emotionally, was naturally limited technically and intellectually; but it was about all that would normally be available if one were a woman or if one belonged to the lower strata of society. If one belonged to the elite of upper class males however, or if one were among the relatively few women who received an education, or even if one were fairly lower down in the social hierarchy but had a special interest in learning and were lucky enough to find a teacher, then the folk culture of one's community was the popular background against which one received classical learning. For the sake of a concrete example, let us consider the intellectual training of a traditional Hindu in Kerala in the early nineteenth century, before the introduction of modern education.

In traditional Kerala, a child's literate education would start, when the child was three to five years old, with a ceremony of initiation into letters, performed on some suitable occasion of religious worship. Along with the usual devotional rituals, a respected teacher or elder would pull out the child's tongue and symbolically write on it an invocation to the god Gaṇapati and the letters of the alphabet with a gold coin or ring. Then the teacher or elder would make the child trace out the same religious invocation and the letters of the alphabet in some rice spread out on a plate. And finally the teacher would receive some kind of offering from the child as a sign that the child was now accepted as a pupil. Writing on the tongue with something made of gold would symbolize the importance of chanting and reciting in traditional education; and soon after this ceremony the young pupil would begin formal lessons in reciting the alphabet, always starting the recitation with the religious invocation to Gaṇapati.

After learning to chant by heart both single letters and combined letters in alphabetical order, the pupil would start learning to write: first with a finger in spread out sand and then with a metal stylus on palm leaf (which is how books were traditionally written). The next stage of lessons would be to recite songs and verses, occasionally noting them down by writing on palm leaf both for practice at writing and for future reference; but mainly a pupil would recite songs and verses over and over again till

these were learned thoroughly by heart. At first much of what was recited would not be understood, because the literary language of verse was somewhat different from ordinary conversation; and so at first the pupil would concentrate on correctly chanting the syllables without worrying much about the meaning, but eventually the meaning would strike him and he would then understand and think about the verses, many of which would remain in his memory for life.

The songs first recited would be mainly religious praises in worship of various deities, but after a while a pupil would also learn didactic verses giving instruction on a number of subjects: in particular on morality and human conduct, on time and calendar reckoning (which were astrologically based in traditional society), on casting simple horoscopes, on simple arithmetic, and sometimes on the elements of medicine and farming and on the casting of spells through chants and rituals. This would be about the extent of a child's primary education: teaching the child to recite and write in the commonly spoken vernacular language of Malayalam, and introducing the basic elements of knowledge through which day to day affairs were conducted in traditional society.

After this primary education, which lasted a couple of years, if a student wanted to continue his studies, which he would if he were a Brahmin or nobleman or if he were otherwise of cultured family or if he were specially interested in learning, then in order to pursue a systematic intellectual training he would have to learn a classical language and study the classics in that language, which would be quite different from the commonly spoken language of Malayalam that he used in everyday life. The chief classical language of Kerala was Sanskrit, and ancient Tamil was often added on as a second classical language. Since Sanskrit and Tamil learning were basically similar from our point of view, let us assume it was Sanskrit that was being learned.

Well, after learning the Sanskrit alphabet, a student would start learning to recite by heart an entire dictionary composed in verse. Actually it was more like a thesaurus than today's alphabetically listed dictionaries, in the sense that it consisted in a pretty exhaustive list of Sanskrit words and their synonyms in Sanskrit. Since this Sanskrit thesaurus, when first learned, would just be an enormous string of foreign words most of which were unfamiliar, learning it by heart would be quite a feat of repetitive recitation and memorization, which took more than a year of concentrated, full-time study. But it was composed in Sanskrit verse, which was designed for pleasure of recitation in the sheer sound and rhythm of chanting; and the student would understand a few words, since his own spoken language of Malayalam was in fair part derived from Sanskrit. Of course, once a student understood one out of a group of synonyms, he would understand them all, so it was an excellent base that would be very useful in the future for a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit. And what better alternative could there be, at a time when printed textbooks and dictionaries were not available?

After learning the dictionary by heart, to get a firm basis in Sanskrit vocabulary, the student would have another, easier exercise in memorization. The next text to be learned was a grammar, also composed in verse, giving the conjugations and declensions of the various classes of Sanskrit words. This was easier than the dictionary, because he could apply his intelligence to the regular patterns of grammar; and it took only a few months of recitation and repetition.

After the dictionary and the grammar, the student would start learning to analyse and understand Sanskrit verse, starting usually with simple literary and religious

verses. The teacher would recite a verse and the student would recite after him till it was learned by heart, which would not take long since by now the student was used to learning by recitation. Having recited the verse, teacher and student would go on to an exercise of formally analysing the verse, all by oral recitation. First, the continuous series of syllables of the verse would be split up into words, and here the dictionary that had been memorized would be of use. Then the conjugation or declension of each word would be identified, and here the grammar that had been memorized was used. Next, the case-endings of each word would be changed to equivalent case-endings from the student's own language of Malayalam. After that, the Sanskrit words would be substituted by more familiar Malayalam words, and so a formal translation would be achieved. Finally, the teacher would explain and illustrate the meaning of the verse; and this would be the interesting, enjoyable part of the instruction, the student's reward of understanding for all the formalities he had been through.

But, for homework outside class, the student would have to go on repeating the verse and the formal analysis and he would also think about his teacher's explanation, so as to fix the verse firmly in his memory and to understand its meaning thoroughly. In the course of a couple of years more of memorizing and analysing verses like this, the student would gradually learn to read ordinary Sanskrit verse on his own and he could then proceed to a study of higher Sanskrit literature and the traditional sciences.

The traditional sciences were called *śāstras*, after the classic texts in which they were codified. They were presented and learned by recitation and exposition of the appropriate texts, which were usually composed in verse or sometimes in prose aphorisms. Both verses and aphorisms were intended to be learnt by heart and fixed in the memory for future reference; and their meaning was supposed to be thought over again and again by continued recitation, guided by textual commentaries and person to person explanation. It may seem odd to us today that science should be taught and learned, and scientific principles quoted and discussed, through rhythmically chanted verses; but that is the way it was, and in fact it was really quite natural and reasonable at a time when printing had not enabled textbooks and reference works to be easily at hand.

Without modern media to provide easy reference to extensively recorded information, systems of knowledge had to be carried much more in people's heads; and the simplest way to do this was to remember things through rhythmic verses or aphorisms that could be called to mind and thought about or quoted for discussion, where today we can look up a book or get a computer read-out as and when we need a piece of information. Thus, like the rest of traditional culture, traditional science was presented through forms that were highly intensive in character. There is only a limited amount that people can carry in their heads, and therefore knowledge that had to be personally remembered could not spell out nearly as much information in unequivocal detail as modern science and technology do. Accordingly, the verses and aphorisms of traditional science were highly condensed, in the sense that they required considerable interpretation and explanation and they were often intended to lead the mind to deeper and deeper meanings through repeated consideration.

After the initial three or four years that a student took just to learn the general language of Sanskrit, from vocabulary and grammar to the analysis and comprehension of ordinary Sanskrit verse, another six or more years of full-time, intensively supervised training would be required to reach the status of a reasonable scholar, with a general knowledge of the branches of traditional learning and a normal specialization

in one of them. Merely reading or reciting the texts was not enough, a scholar had to explain and elaborate the quotations he made; and it was this ability to use what was quoted to drive a point home that gave scholars their considerable status and power as the teachers and counsellors of traditional society.

Given that traditional culture was carried through tightly organized systems of condensed forms that could be personally remembered and handed down without much use of media, what were the all important personal contacts through which culture was transmitted? In traditional civilization, people lived spread out over the cultivated countryside, in their villages and ancestral homes. Their contacts with each other were mainly through personal travel, and hence learning was sought either by inviting scholars and teachers to visit and stay or by travelling to a cultural centre of some kind. There were three main kinds of cultural centre in traditional India.

First, there were the courts of rajas and noblemen, who were themselves often considerable scholars and who patronized learning and the arts as primary expressions of the values that justified their royal and aristocratic rule.

Second, there were the temples, where considerable effort and wealth was devoted to art and learning, as means of expressing and interpreting the imaginative forms of religion. The important temples were centres of pilgrimage, where people journeyed to see their gods manifested in religious architecture, sculpture and ceremonial drama, and where priests and scholars established themselves to cultivate the devotional life and to interpret it for the pilgrims who came to take part.

Third, there were the homes of individual teachers, or families and groups of teachers, to learn from whom people came from near and far and stayed sometimes for extended periods of time. This last kind of cultural centre was very important in traditional society, because, as I have been trying to show, traditional culture was organized so that it could be passed from one individual to another without any large or complicated set-up.

The teacher-pupil relationship was all that was really important to hand over traditional knowledge, and the personal bond between teacher and pupil was valued above all else in traditional Indian learning. Pupils quite literally worshipped their teachers, as embodiments of the sacred principle of knowledge that was conceived to give meaning and life to the technical formalities of learning; for it was after all the teacher who explained things and led students to understand and appreciate the difficult forms they worked so hard to learn. So a teacher was loved and respected as a spiritual father to his students, who owed him personal devotion and often worshipped him like a god, as prescribed in the Sanskrit precept 'Ācārya devo bhavaḥ'. And, where ultimate knowledge was conceived to be taught, a teacher was sometimes even worshipped above the gods, as in the famous verses of devotion to a teacher who stands for an all-encompassing reality that includes Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the almighty trinity of whom other gods are part.[1]

All this seems very odd indeed to our modern, secularized view of knowledge, but to examine it further we need to ask what traditional knowledge was and how it was conceived. What were the disciplines of traditional Hindu culture and what were they supposed to achieve?

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[1] Gurur brahma gurur viṣṇu gurur devo mahesvaraḥ
Guruḥ sākṣāt paraṁ brahma tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ

The disciplines of traditional culture

Any kind of knowledge, whether modern or traditional, has three aspects: practical, intellectual and emotional. The practical aspect of knowledge is concerned with doing things, or in other words with carrying out actions required to achieve desired results. The intellectual aspect of knowledge is concerned with thinking about things, or in other words with considering actions and results so as to come to an understanding of what they achieve. The emotional aspect of knowledge is concerned with feeling the use and value of things; or in other words with judging actions and results so as to express understanding of what they achieve and the direction in which they lead.

Let us look at the range of traditional-disciplines, by asking how they developed the practical, intellectual and emotional aspects of knowledge.

Practical disciplines: By modern standards, traditional knowledge was obviously rather short on engineering; because, before printing, society lacked the ability to record and transmit the extensive information required to develop engineering technology. Hence, with relatively little capacity to engineer the external environment, traditional technology concentrated on human skills and the trained performance of body and mind. Co-ordinated skills of bodily performance were developed through systems of art and craft, and personal powers of mental performance were conceived to be developed through disciplines of ritual and mystical concentration.

The major arts and crafts of traditional civilization were: the agricultural arts of farming and husbandry, the mercantile arts of trade and commerce, the political arts of statecraft and government, the martial arts of combat and warfare, performing arts like music and dance, crafts of construction like building and architecture, manufacturing crafts like pottery and metalwork, and ornamental or decorative crafts like carving and painting. These traditional arts and crafts were throughout rather closely involved with ritual, including areas of technology like building and politics and trade which today we do not associate with ritual at all.

Since life was organized so much through obedience and faith towards forms prescribed by tradition, there was clearly a strong psychological need to build up a sense of the power and authority of prescribed forms, and this was achieved through rituals that symbolically authenticated traditional activity by invoking underlying powers and laws of the universe. Hence ritual entered everywhere, and no activity was undertaken unless the appropriate rituals were performed and the time was ritually right, so that time reckoning and the calendar were bound up with ritual and were based on the same astrological sciences that regulated and explained the performance of ritual.

Given that ritual was so prevalent in traditional society, we need to consider it further, and that brings us to what may be called the ‘mental technology’ of traditional culture. A ritual is an example of what we may call a ‘mental practice’: an activity through which the mind is focussed on prescribed forms. The performance of a ritual was conceived to concentrate the powers of the mind so as to have a direct mental influence on the external world, in order to bring about some sort of desired practical result such as prosperity to oneself and one’s friends or ruin to an enemy. I use the phrase ‘direct mental influence’ in the sense that ritual was not conceived to work through understanding and subsequent action in the way that intellectual ideas are applied. What was considered important was to attend to the correct form of the ritual quite apart from any explanation or analysis of meaning, as for example a mantra or

chant was conceived to have its ritual effect through the shape of the sounds uttered and not through the intellectual meaning of the words.[1]

This notion of direct mental influences in the external world does not quite fit in with our normal conception of the world today; and so we are apt to dismiss ritual as a mere product of ignorance and superstition, basically opposed to reason and knowledge. Naturally, this is not how ritual was viewed in traditional society; and, as we shall soon see, there was a highly rational, sophisticated conception of the universe involved in the practice of ritual. While ritual, like any other human activity, was acknowledged to be often misused and misrepresented through ignorance and superstition, the potential effectiveness of ritual techniques was considered to be developed by their systematic use in a number of well-organized and rationally thought-out ritual disciplines, including not only the disreputable and vindictive arts of witchcraft but also reputable arts of humanitarian intent: like the cure of snake-bite, or like priestcraft with its psychological comfort of distressed persons through rituals that were intended to ‘clear the atmosphere’ of evil influences and conflicts.

A ritual practitioner was supposed to develop a special ability to concentrate mental force through the use of his techniques, and the training of a practitioner demanded long, arduous exercises in mental concentration, as for example one of the ways conceived for acquiring the power to use a mantra or ritual chant was to recite it as many hundred thousand times as there were syllables in it. And further, rituals and mantras were supposed to be performed with the strictest attention to formal exactness, because it was conceived that the slightest variation of detail could drastically alter the subtle, mental effect through which a ritual or a mantra is supposed to work.

It should be clear by now that what I call ‘mental practice’ is a more superficial function of the mind than thought and feeling. A mental practice simply makes the mind follow or pay attention to a given form; and hence mental practice is a technical preliminary to processes of thought and feeling, which use forms as ideas that enquire after understanding and as symbols that express value. For example, when one reads a book, one has first of all to pay attention to the words; and that is a preliminary to the processes of thought and feeling involved in understanding the meaning of the book. In the same way of course, ritual forms also had an intellectual aspect of meaning that could be thought about and an emotional aspect of meaning that could be felt, but the distinguishing feature of ritual was that its primary intention was neither intellectual nor emotional. The primary intention of ritual was the practical concentration of mental force so as to have a direct practical effect, not through intellectual or emotional application, but through the subtle laws of mental power that were conceived to underlie the events of the world.

There was one more mental discipline whose intention was primarily practical, rather than intellectual or emotional. This was the discipline of yoga; and it differed from ritual disciplines in that it did not directly aim to affect the external world, but to develop an inner core of the human personality through exercises of mental concentration. Again, it was neither intellectual nor emotional meaning that was of primary importance for the exercises of yoga. What was considered important was to concen-

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[1] See page 26, note 2 for an account of how the Vedas were carefully learned and recited for ritual purposes, with very, very few of those who recited them ever enquiring into their intellectual meaning.

trate attention through the practice of formal meditation – mentally repeating a prescribed form over and over again and shutting out everything else – until the process led to a highly focussed, trance-like state of mind called *samādhi*.

By continually performing this kind of exercise, a person who practised yoga was supposed to become detached from the distractions and limitations of the external world, hence focussing basic attitudes and awareness towards union with an ultimate spiritual principle that was conceived to be both the centre of the individual personality and the basic reality behind the superficial appearances of the external world. Thus, to the traditional Hindu mind yoga was, quite simply, the ultimate technology: which, along with ritual technology, should become a little clearer as we now turn to the intellectual aspect of traditional knowledge and its conceptions of cosmic and human reality.

Intellectual disciplines: Because of the spectacular success of modern physical science and technology, we tend to presume that all intellectual disciplines must be like the physical sciences, if we are to consider them valid forms of knowledge. I do not feel this is right at all, neither for modern society nor for any other society, and I would argue that intellectual disciplines like the humanities and human sciences are essentially different in character from the physical sciences.

A modern physical science, in fact, is a very special kind of intellectual discipline in which theory is applied to practice in a highly technical way, through technological systems of instrumentation and engineering. This is all very well for that part of our experience which can be made purely technical, but clearly we cannot treat our experience of thought and feeling in this way, because the moment a thought or a feeling becomes a mere technical object it loses its living meaning and becomes an empty form. Hence, where we seek knowledge of human experience that includes not only physical objects but also a mental and emotional component of meaning, then we have to accept that such knowledge cannot be just technically applied, and thus the interpretations of thought and the judgements of feeling must essentially be involved in applying theory to practice.

Let me give an illustration, to suggest how this can be so. Suppose I want to go from one place to another. I can either follow a set of instructions that tell me which roads to follow and which turns to take, or I can try to understand the area I am travelling in, by considering what the important roads are and what obstructions have to be crossed or gone around. And though it takes a little more time and intelligence, such an understanding of the geography of an area would give me a much more basic and flexible ability to travel from one place to another than a prescribed set of instructions would. Hence, on the one hand, thought and theory can relate to practice directly, by codifying and instructing practice, as for example, places and roads are named and travel instructions are given; or, on the other hand, thought and theory can relate to practice indirectly, but more basically, by leading to an understanding of the realities that practice confronts, as for example a map can develop a traveller's identification of landmarks and his sense of direction by helping him understand the geography of an area in which he travels.

Accordingly, intellectual disciplines have two functions: the first function being directed towards technology, by formulating techniques and instructing their use; and the second function being directed towards understanding, by clarifying the basic

perspectives and attitudes through which experience is interpreted and judgements of value and use are made.

Like the intellectual disciplines of the modem world, the sciences of traditional society could be oriented either towards technology or towards understanding, and in either case traditional sciences were empirical in the sense that they were based on practical experience. But the historical circumstances of traditional society required intellectual theory to be differently presented from what we are used to in the modem world. Because of the need for intensive, condensed presentation (as I have earlier described), traditional theory had to be presented through bare, authoritative assertions of established principles; and it was left to the student, under his teacher's guidance, to relate these assertions of principle to particular experience.

At a time when texts were not printed for extensive reading and reference, but were condensed into verses and aphorisms designed for memorization and repetition, it was not possible for a traditional text to derive, explain and justify its theories with extensive discussion and information in the modem, more democratic manner of presentation. Traditional teachers generally lacked the extensive educational materials required to give students much opportunity for democratic enquiry and discussion, and hence the traditional presentation of theory was based on the authority of great men of knowledge and the texts they composed and handed down; so much so that the same word, *śāstra*, is used both for the sciences of intellectually organized knowledge and for the texts through which traditional sciences were handed down.

But this authoritative identification of science and text should not be allowed to deceive us into thinking that traditional science was purely textual and theoretical and not basically empirical. A traditional student was supposed to work extremely hard going deep into the meaning of the texts, so as to reach an understanding that would stand the test of continued practical experience; and this penetration of a text, to realize its empirical meaning, was considered to be the crucial part of learning that only a teacher could provide. So it is significant that while traditional texts were valued and respected as authoritative sources of theory, the respect and reverence accorded to teachers was far higher, as embodiments of the knowledge behind theories and texts.

After these general remarks about traditional theories, we need to ask more specifically what the theories were. First, let us consider the technologically oriented disciplines that codified systems of practice and laid down the principles involved.

All the major systems of traditional practice were codified in various texts and organized in consultation with men of learning who read and interpreted the texts. Traditional arts and crafts like architecture and the performing arts were carried out mainly by castes of hereditary artists and craftsmen, directed by members of the learned classes who gave instructions based on their study of the appropriate texts. Social and political organization was codified in classic texts with whose contents kings and rulers were familiar and about which they were advised by ministers and scholars. And the practices of literature and scholarship were definitively laid down in the theoretical texts of grammar, poetics, logic and debate; so that the traditional theories of literature and argument were the first intellectual disciplines a student learnt, providing the beginnings of an intellectual training by teaching a student to think systematically about the literary and scholarly practices with which he was confronted.

Traditional systems of ritual practice were similarly codified and prescribed in authoritative texts, and the thinking behind ritual was rationally organized and developed in sciences, like astrology, that involved the theory of *karma* and the traditional conception of the universe. The word karma simply means 'action', and according to the theory of karma the actions and experiences of life are conceived to leave behind *saṁskāras* or personal tendencies that go into the make-up of character. So far this is in line with any modern psychological theory, and saṁskāras are just inclinations of thought and feeling created by a person's actions and experiences. But these saṁskāras or tendencies of personality were further conceived as subtle forces which have a direct influence not only on thought and feeling within a living body but also on the world outside; and here we really are up against an unfamiliar conception of the universe which we find hard to understand. We simply have no notion of subtle forces or subtle causation in the external universe. So, as far as we are concerned, the external world outside of living bodies is purely physical, and thought and feeling are expressed in the world only through the physical actions of living bodies.

Well, according to traditional conceptions, the visible universe works through the operation of two different kinds of force: first the gross forces through which physical matter interacts, and second the subtle forces through which thoughts and feelings interact and are expressed in the outside world. Subtle forces are so called because they are normally dispersed in the outside world in away that makes them hard to perceive and requires the interpretation of special sciences like astrology. However, living creatures are able to concentrate subtle force: either ordinarily, within their own bodies, or extraordinarily, when mental concentration becomes sufficiently intense to extend into the world outside. Thus concentrated, subtle forces have a gross, material effect; as for example when people's actions quite normally express their thoughts and feelings, or when some special occurrence in the outside world results from the focus of mental force created by a powerful ritual or a person of powerful mind.

Let us put aside our obvious prejudices for a moment and rationally consider the traditional conception I have just outlined. It differs from our own conception of the universe only in extraordinary circumstances of mental concentration or through complex interpretations and sophisticated perceptions of ordinary phenomena like the positions of stars and the behaviour of living beings. In a similar way, Einstein's theory of relativity differs from Newtonian physics only at extraordinarily high speeds or through complex interpretations and sophisticated perceptions of ordinary phenomena like electromagnetism and the properties of matter. When two conceptions or theories differ like this, clearly the only way to decide between them is empirically, by trying out each conception or theory in a rational spirit to see whether it leads to a useful understanding of the phenomena it concerns, just as it was found that Einstein's theory of relativity led to a useful understanding of electromagnetism and related physical phenomena.

The traditional conception of subtle forces in the universe was not primarily concerned with physical phenomena, but rather with mentally related phenomena of life about which we have made relatively little systematic enquiry in the modern world. We assume that mind and matter somehow relate within the living body in the sense that we interpret the actions of living bodies as expressions of thought and feeling, but we have thought out no clear conception of what this means. We maintain that mind and matter do not relate outside living bodies because we find physical explanations usually satisfactory for physical phenomena outside the living body, but this is about

as rational as rejecting the theory of relativity because Newtonian physics is usually satisfactory for Newtonian phenomena that avoid the effect of some fundamental principles of electromagnetism and atomic physics. Without further enquiry into fundamental questions of life and mind which our physical sciences tend to avoid, I suggest we cannot too easily dismiss traditional society's claim that its conception of the universe was empirically substantiated: on the one hand by the extraordinary experiences of mental concentration encountered in ritual and meditation, and on the other hand by the complex interpretations that were developed in sciences like astrology for deciphering the expression of subtle forces in the external universe.

According to the theory of karma, the course of a person's future was subtly determined by the saṁskāras or personal tendencies that previous actions and experiences had built up. And further, this process of personal action and inclination, or *karma* as it was called, was expressed through the subtle connections of the universe in omens and portents of various kinds, as for example in the position of stars in the sky or in the lines on the palm of one's hand. Such was the bent of reasoning developed in sciences like astrology, which interpreted omens and portents in the external universe in order to make statements about people's actions and inclinations.

Astrology was in fact one of the most important and popular of traditional sciences, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it. was a fascinating subject of intellectual enquiry; and, practically, it had widespread applications not merely to make personal predictions and to reckon time and the calendar but, more importantly, to prescribe rituals and actions suited to the subtle forces that were conceived to govern people's lives at each point of time. In effect, astrology used configurations of stars as abstract patterns in terms of which human inclinations were expressed, and hence thought about over and over again. Thus, whether this expression of human inclinations in abstract patterns of the universe is a matter of subtle forces outside the human body or whether it is an imagined projection from the human mind, the calculations and interpretations of astrology and similar sciences were often used to develop the remarkably effective perception and handling of psychology for which astrologers are famous, just as modern psychoanalysts can use any of a number of conflicting theories to develop their understanding and treatment of patients.

Where astrological science conceived that its function was to keep people's actions and rituals in tune with the subtle forces of the universe, we can, in part, translate this conception into more familiar psychological terms by noting what many people who visit skilful astrologers and fortune-tellers report today. Through a few uncannily sharp suggestions and questions, an astrologer can stimulate a person's wishes and worries for the future to come out into the open, where they can be dealt with by some thought-provoking, if sometimes cryptic, pronouncements.

In traditional society, whose circumstances favoured obedience and faith over independence of mind, astrological pronouncements were used far more than seems appropriate today to make personal decisions like whom to marry or when to start a project or which rituals and ceremonies to perform. So, while there must have been a great deal of politically motivated deception practised under the guise of astrology (as also under the guise of other traditional learning like genealogy and history), there must as well have been those who used astrological and soothsaying science to achieve a certain wisdom about human nature and to put this wisdom to effect, by making interpretations of human situations and recommendations of actions and rituals that were, at least, psychologically apt.

Traditional medicine, called Ayurveda, was another important and popular science that worked by developing subtle skills of human perception and judgement. After a few years of learning Sanskrit and Sanskrit verse in the regular manner, a medical student would spend several years intensively studying the theory of medicine by reciting and discussing the classic texts. Then there would be a period of several years apprenticeship under a practising physician, the student accompanying the physician on his rounds and learning the techniques of diagnosis and treatment.

Traditional medicine of course lacked the technological institutions of modern medicine. There was no organized service of hospitals and clinics, on our modern scale, to maintain standards of nursing and therapy; there were no pathology laboratories and medical machines to make standard diagnostic tests, no pharmaceutical companies to develop and manufacture standard drugs; and neither medical journals nor printed textbooks were constantly being published to keep doctors in touch with what others were doing and to keep consolidating different experiences into standard theory.

Thus, where a modern doctor is part of an organized medical service, the traditional physician depended to a much larger extent on his own individual skills. The classic techniques of diagnosis and treatment that were codified in the texts were not carried out through extensively organized clinical standards but had to be personally learned through apprenticeship, along with more esoteric techniques that were not mentioned in the texts but were the speciality of individual traditions. And, without the surgical and laboratory technologies that support modern anatomical, physiological and biochemical theories, traditional medicine developed theories of constitutional balance that were not so much oriented to technologies of physical mechanism and chemical process as to the skills of perception and judgement through which diagnoses and prescriptions were made.

Ayurvedic medicine conceived basically that the health of a living body is constituted by a balance of different factors: in particular the balance of the three doṣas (or primary humours) and the balance of qualities like ‘hot’, ‘cold’, ‘dry’, ‘wet’, ‘sour’, ‘sweet’. The theory of Ayurveda goes on to relate these balancing factors to bodily organs and functions, so as to indicate how they are manifested in evident symptoms and how they can be affected by treatment. By thinking about his continuing medical experience in terms of this theory, a physician was supposed to sharpen the subtle interpretation of symptoms through which he perceived where the imbalance behind ill-health lay, and thus he was supposed also to develop his ability to judge which treatments would correct the imbalance and effect a cure.

Unfortunately, traditional medical concepts like the humours were related to bodily organs and functions by describing them in physiological metaphors that we tend to translate far too literally into our modern surgical and laboratory-based conceptions of physical mechanisms and chemical processes in the living body. Hence we have prematurely dismissed much traditional medical theory as inaccurate physiology, when really the theories we so dismiss are not, in our terms, physiology at all. For example, the traditional medical terms ‘hot’ and ‘cold’, when used for the effect of food and other substances on the human body, do not refer simply to physical temperature taken with a thermometer, but require a rather more subtle perception and interpretation.

Thus there has so far been little serious enquiry by modern medicine into traditional theories of constitutional balance; and, further, many traditional medical skills appear

to have been lost in the upheavals of modernization. But those who continue to practise medical systems like Ayurveda say that though their medicine tends to be less obviously related to physiological organs and symptoms than are surgical operations and laboratory-made drugs, it has its own use, for it seeks to treat the regenerative powers of living bodies at a deeper level of biological balance than mechanical and chemical corrections such as the removal or suppression of disease organisms.

So far, we have discussed intellectual disciplines applied through techniques that regulate and control the practical effect of theoretical principles and laws. Since such techniques of practical regulation and control imply basically a separation of regular effects from the random disturbances of uncontrolled experience, it follows that technological control is achieved only at the cost of specialized application, and a technologically applied science is accordingly restricted to a specialized field of study. As for example a physical science is restricted to the specialized field defined by its instruments, laboratories and machines; or astrology is restricted to the circumscribed area of personal action defined by the techniques of horoscope casting and interpretation; or a branch of medicine is restricted to the area of illness and health defined by its methods of diagnosis and cure.

By contrast, traditional philosophy sought a fundamental understanding of the nature of experience and reality in general; and thus it was conceived to apply to all experience and activity, not just to the limited area of specialization served by a particular technology. Accordingly, philosophical knowledge was not intended to limit its application to any particular field of technology, but rather to apply by correcting the basic perspective through which conscious beings experience reality. For this basic perspective was argued to be the fundamental understanding on which more superficial kinds of understanding and more superficial perceptions, attitudes, feelings, thoughts and actions are ultimately based.

Traditional Indian philosophy conceived that one ultimate principle of truth was the basis of all experience. This ultimate principle was said to have three aspects. In the first place, it was the basis of existence, or the reality that confronts action. In the second place, it was the basis of knowledge, through which reality is perceived. And finally, it was the basis of value, through which action is motivated in its confrontation with reality. In other words, the same ultimate principle of truth was conceived to be experienced in three different ways: as reality when encountered in action, as knowledge when sought after in thought, and as value when expressed in feeling.

This gave rise to three different kinds of spiritual discipline with the common aim of realizing ultimate truth: first, the practical discipline of yoga, through exercises of concentrated meditation; second, the intellectual discipline of philosophy (called jnana), through the enquiry of thought into understanding; and third, the emotional discipline of devotion (called bhakti), through the cultivation of feeling and love. Thus the mysticism of yoga and the devotion of bhakti were conceived to be alternative ways for approaching the same truth of experience that was also approached by the analytic reason of philosophy.

To the traditional Indian mind, as yoga was the ultimate technology, so also philosophy was the ultimate science, representing the sacred principle of knowledge that

was considered to be nothing less than the spiritual centre of ultimate value around which the entire tradition and all its values revolved.[1]

Emotional disciplines: Emotions, I suggest, are a direct way of applying understanding. Where technology applies knowledge explicitly, through techniques formulated and instructed by thought to achieve prescribed ends, emotions apply understanding implicitly, not through self-conscious analysis of means and ends, but by expressing an immediate sense of the use and value of things. This immediate, emotional sense of judgement is developed on the one hand by idealizing or imagining things of value, and on the other hand by putting ideals or imaginatively conceived values into practice. Accordingly, the emotional aspect of knowledge is developed in disciplines of two kinds: first, creative disciplines concerned with imaginative forms of emotional expression; and second, ethical disciplines concerned with the judgement of values that our conduct and actions express.

In traditional civilization, creative disciplines of literary and artistic imagination centred on stories from epic and religious texts. Unlike a printed novel that is read today as one of many, quite separate works of available fiction, an epic or a religious text was an authoritative account which described some important part of the legendary past or the religious cosmos; and thus it established incidents, characters and situations that were meant to be portrayed again and again, for the purposes of entertainment and ritual symbolism, in traditional story-telling, dramatic performance and imaginative art.

The Hindu tradition contained two major epics, called the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, and a large number of religious myths, set out in texts called the *Purāṇas*. Through stories of legendary heroes and personified gods, the epics and *Purāṇas* expressed ideals of social life and personal endeavour – with both a secular content suggesting how life should be organized in society and a spiritual content symbolizing the ultimate values to which conscious beings were conceived to aspire, beyond relative values depending on material forms of social and cultural organization. An epic or Purāṇic story could of course be elaborated and interpreted in many ways, and this enabled the epics and *Purāṇas* to embody, in concrete personal symbols of legendary and cosmic history, an encyclopaedic range of knowledge.

As a result, epic or Purāṇic exposition and interpretation was a major means of teaching and learning not only morals and religion but also many other areas of knowledge, like the arts of human relations and politics, the astrological and psychological sciences behind ritual and yogic practice, and the fundamental conceptions of philosophy. The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* epics, and the related epic stories in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, had naturally a more pronounced secular content than the religious myths of the *Purāṇas*; but it is a measure of the pervasiveness of religion in traditional life that, while setting out the basic ideals and values of secular life, these major epics were also interpreted as sacred texts, because they were conceived to describe incarnations of the supreme god Vishnu in the human lives of two epic heroes, Rāma and Krishna.

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[1] The Sanskrit word for philosophy (used in many modern Indian languages, as for example in Malayalam) is *tattvaśāstra*, which means literally, ‘The science of truth’.

The ethical disciplines that put traditional ideals and values into practice were centred on the cultivation of devotion. At a time when communications were lacking to enable the democratic transmission of many independent points of view, people developed their judgement of value less by the self-discipline of independent-minded choice than by devotion towards the prescribed forms of tradition and towards the persons who administered and interpreted traditional forms, thus representing the authority and experience of tradition. Hence society was organized through secular values that centred on devotion towards the prescribed rules of duty and the personal representatives of authority in family, community and feudal state; and this entire secular order was justified by reference to a supreme centre of ultimate value that was approached through religious and spiritual devotion.

In the Hindu tradition, religious devotion was cultivated towards the gods and their incarnations described in the *Purāṇas* and the epics; and from the diverse pantheon of Purāṇic gods and divine incarnations a worshipper would choose the deity who personally appealed to him (his *iṣṭa-mūrti*), so that this personal deity could be approached and loved through attributes of praise and attentions of worship which a devotee found personally moving and satisfying. In the course of a developing relationship between devotee and god, a devotee would ask for personal favours and boons, worshipping with the self-denial of intense purpose (called *tapas*) in order to bring about an appearance of the deity, who would either grant or otherwise pronounce judgement upon the wishes and desires that were sought to be fulfilled.

Though religion was thus approached through personal feeling, its essential purpose was of course to lead beyond the petty limits and the passing variations of personal form. The personified forms of gods and worship prescribed by religion were supposed to embody an ultimate principle of value that led towards a profound devotion in which all personal desires and feelings would eventually be surrendered – as they came to serve and express it, more and more faithfully. By the constant attentions of worship, through rituals, prayers, songs, chants, and through emotional experiences of religious imagination and vision, a devotee's love was conceived to grow towards a final state of fulfilment in which the devotee would always see – no matter what he did or where he looked – the ultimate, all-pervasive truth symbolized by the deity's form.

Where religion was the popular culture of spiritual devotion, followed by the common people of traditional Hindu society, two further ways of cultivating devotion were followed by those with a special interest in spiritual exercises and education.

Asceticism (called *sannyāsa*) was a negative approach to spiritual devotion, undertaken by renouncing ordinary desires and fulfilments and by withdrawing from normal social life in order to devote time and attention to the pursuit of spiritual exercises. Ascetics (called *sannyāsis*) were on the whole very highly regarded; and when they chose to return into contact with society, their special experiences and insights made them cultural leaders with a profound effect on the growth of the Hindu tradition, in particular through the mystical exercises of mental concentration and devotional imagination that were developed by ascetics in the disciplines of yoga and religion.

Through yogic and religious mysticism, ascetic renunciation influenced philosophy and learning in general, but the values of philosophy and learning were by no means always ascetic; for they centred upon another, more positive kind of devotion, the devotion of a student towards a traditional teacher. Since a teacher personally repre-

sented the knowledge behind traditional forms, devotion to one's teacher was an important way of putting into personal practice the supreme spiritual value accorded to an ultimate principle of pure knowledge (*śuddha jñāna*) that was conceived to underlie the names and forms of learning.

And here we must again return to the contrast between traditional society and the modern world, for improved communications have enabled many fields of knowledge to become less dependent on sitting at a teacher's feet and on authoritative justification in ultimate, spiritual terms. Hence we have developed an extensive, public area of secular knowledge that leaves room for individual freedom of interpretation where spiritual questions are concerned; and we tend to describe things primarily in terms of the extensive secular knowledge that is our public standard today, perhaps following such a secular description with a suggestion of any spiritual questions that are thought to be involved.

By contrast, the traditional way of describing things was to start with established spiritual conceptions, from which secular principles were then authoritatively derived. Accordingly, I must warn my readers that I have not described the disciplines of traditional culture in quite the way that they would traditionally be described. From the traditional Hindu viewpoint, all human development stems from an ultimate spiritual truth, which the Vedas were the first texts to reveal. Thus the tradition of texts which scholars learned was described as derived from the Vedas, and traditional scholarship generally considered all knowledge and culture to be an unfolding of principles implicitly contained in the Vedas and progressively made more explicit in subsequent sequences of texts.

However, it is clearly not a sufficient view of culture just to tie it to sequences of texts. The status accorded to the Vedas was only a traditional convention, firmly maintained in public so as to uphold the respect for authority upon which traditional society depended. Beneath this outwardly authoritarian position, there was a deeper questioning that was more highly valued but kept secret, for fear of disrupting the social and cultural order of ordinary society. We see this questioning in the Vedas and Upanishads themselves, and it continues through the subsequent tradition.

Thus quietly, a more philosophical view of culture was developed, by conceiving that all human beings – whether knowingly or unknowingly – proceed towards ultimate truth along three paths: the paths of *yoga* (action), *jñāna* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion). In other words, all culture was considered as a means to spiritual attainment associated with the three ultimate disciplines of yoga, philosophy and devotion. It is this old conception that I have tried to adapt to a modern description: by dividing culture into practical, intellectual and emotional disciplines; and by considering, in each of these divisions, first the secular aspect of culture and then the spiritual ends that were conceived to be sought.

The historical records of this book

In order to give my study of traditional learning a concrete historical setting, I have concentrated on Kerala state in south-west India, a large part of which remained under the traditional rule of Hindu rajas until Indian independence in 1947. The main body of this book (chapters 1 to 7) consists of a few historical records that I was able to find in Kerala and present in conveniently readable form. Since such conveniently present-

able records never tell the whole story. I had also to rely, for a general picture of traditional learning, on discussions with people who had experienced traditional culture and on my own direct observations during the year and a half I spent in Kerala between 1972 and 1974.

I would like to mention here that I am greatly indebted to the Nāyar family with whom I stayed and in whose home traditional culture was very much alive. In particular, the elderly gentleman of the house taught me Malayalam (the commonly spoken language of Kerala) and was a most able interpreter of traditional practices and conceptions, so that I owe a great deal of whatever I learned about traditional culture to his guidance.

It is well known that there is a sad lack of historical records by Hindus, describing for us their own way of life and society before the nineteenth century. There are imaginative, laudatory and ideological texts, but few direct historical descriptions to tell us in terms of plain fact how people lived. Fortunately, the initial impact of printed publication and modern historical ideas in the latter half of nineteenth century caused a number of traditional Hindus to write factual descriptions of their life and times; and so, from the mid-nineteenth century on, we do have records that give us an idea of what traditional life and society were like, before they were substantially altered by the spread of modernization through Indian society in the course of the twentieth century.

Such nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of traditional life are often neglected on the rather snobbish grounds that they are too recent to be of interest, but I think that is a mistake, because they give a fascinating picture of an ancient, richly preserved way of life and its modern transformations, as interested readers can judge for themselves from the historical records presented in this book.

Of the records that make up the main body of the book, I find no problem in taking all but the last (chapter 7) to be substantially accurate in matters of fact. Given the obvious respect for knowledge and truth in the Indian tradition and the authors' explicit attempt to record directly experienced historical facts, I see no reason to doubt their veracity. The last historical record, about the life of Caṭṭampi Svāmi, is obviously more problematic, because in the first place it is compiled from other biographies in Malayalam and in the second place many exaggerations and fancies tend to surround a revered figure like Caṭṭampi Svāmi, who was widely regarded as a traditional sage. However, I would point out that Caṭṭampi Svāmi was a historically important person who led a pretty open life in Kerala society in full view of many highly educated, rational men, his original biographers among them. Hence at least the public facts of his life, compiled from the original Malayalam biographies in this more recent English biography, should be substantially correct. Moreover, the biography is interesting both for its account of a range of traditional arts and sciences and for its reflection of traditional attitudes towards the achievement of knowledge.

I have arranged the records to tell their own story about the history of modern India. Chapter 1 is about traditional Brahmins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and it shows the somewhat closed and over-formalized state from which the Indian tradition has had to open up and revive, to meet the challenges of the modern world. I would argue that the millennium preceding the nineteenth century was largely a period of political and social decadence for India, with great classical empires broken up into warring kingdoms and Indian society divided within itself, a great part of India politically overwhelmed by foreign invasions. As a result, the

major vitality of Indian culture turned away from the unfavourable conditions of a disrupted world towards inward-looking ascetic withdrawal and other-worldly religious devotion.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the overall sovereignty of the British had resulted in a period of relative peace and political stability, social conditions began to improve and a more outgoing approach to cultural life became possible. Though the British had established political supremacy, they did not seriously destroy or even repress traditional Indian culture. Thus, the combination of improved social conditions, more positive cultural attitudes and the stimulation of new learning and technology from the West enabled the Indian tradition to open up and unbend in a cultural renaissance that has marked the start of modernization, as an analogous renaissance did in fourteenth to sixteenth century in Europe. Chapter 2 reflects this process of modern renaissance at work in Kerala, through the education and career of a man who was actively involved in literary movements that gave new life to the Indian tradition, making it more widely available through adaptation to the growing new world of printed publication and professional organization.

Chapter 3 shows a slightly different view of the intellectual tradition and its modernization, from the secular rather than the priestly side of traditional society. Where the chief characters in the preceding chapters are from priestly castes who received education and scholarship in their families as a matter of ritual form, we have in chapter 3 a young man from a family of feudal estates managers who followed his passion for knowledge to a traditional centre of learning run by a family of ruling nobility. Though these noblemen were secular lords rather than priestly Brahmins, they were among the leading cultural and literary figures of their time; and the most famous of them all is described in his daughter's brief account of her father's learning, with its leanings towards ritual worship overshadowed by a final transcendence of religious ritual, in the affirmation that 'Knowledge is my supreme divinity.'

Chapters 4 and 5 give a third point of view, that of traditionally based Indians modernized by western intellectual training. Chapter 4 presents two attempts at factual, rational description in modern terms of traditional Indian medicine. Chapter 5 presents the briefest of discussions about two problems that trouble our modern, democratic concern with human equality much more than they did the traditional, authoritarian approach with its hierarchical orders of human existence. The two problems in question are women's education and the education of less favoured classes of society, the fruit of whose labours gave dominant elites the time and the means they needed to devote to pursuits of learning. Since the traditional mind was little bothered by such problems, what records were written must be expected to seem weak and inadequate to our modern view of the importance of social equality; but I have deliberately presented the rather thin records that I found, leaving them to strike the modern reader with their weaknesses and to thus show the gaps in traditional conceptions now confronted by newly pressing and threatening concerns.

Chapters 6 and 7 document a fourth and final aspect of modern Indian history, concerned with the spiritual centre of the Indian tradition. There are three points I would like to make here. First is the leading part played by the spiritual tradition in modernization. Both chapters describe men who stood for the growth of modern self-reliance and independence of mind, using the philosophical core of the spiritual tradition to break away from blind, unquestioning faith in ossified forms of traditional custom and religion. And, I would like to add, this break away from dependence on traditional

form, to re-emphasize an ancient, traditional philosophy of self-dependence, is characteristic of spiritually minded reformers of the period all over India, from Swami Vivekananda to Mahatma Gandhi.

The second point that the records show about spirituality and modernization is the part played by asceticism. Chapter 6 shows asceticism in its aspect of denial and piety: a self-sacrificing involvement in the duties of the world followed by withdrawal into organized spiritual retreat. Chapter 7 shows asceticism in its other aspect of travel and return: a love of knowledge which takes a man away from society and brings him back again full of life and energy to share what he has learned with other people. India has become only too famous for the organized spiritual retreats that are called 'ashrams'; but the individual search for knowledge and return to society is also a classic pattern of Indian tradition that has deeply contributed towards modernization, as I think chapter 7 shows.

My third and last point about chapters 6 and 7 is to warn that they are popularizations written for people with slightly different interests and ideals from a modern international audience. Hence, for us, these accounts cannot be expected to do full justice to the men and the traditions described. Such accounts, I suggest, must rather be read as historical records documenting popular attitudes and views about a lasting philosophical tradition that, after all, should be more profound than the changing conceptions and misconceptions of popularization through which philosophy is viewed by ordinary people, according to their particular time and society.

1. Nampūtiri Brahmins

A Nampūtiri Brahmin boy – upbringing, education and family[1]

Kāṇippayyūr Śaṅkaran Nampūtirippāṭū was born in 1891 near Kunnaṁkuḷaṁ (some five miles north-east of Guruvāyūr, fifteen miles north-west of Trichur, in what was then Cochin State) to an orthodox Brahmin family known for their speciality in *taccu śāstraṁ,* the science of architecture. He has written an autobiography and several other books in the Malayalam language, with the intention of recording the customs of a passing age. The first volume of the autobiography deals with his life up to the age of thirty-five and gives many details about Nampūtiri Brahmin life during that period. It contains interesting accounts of traditional upbringing, primary education and Vedic education[2]; and a few excerpts are translated and adapted below to give an idea of the upbringing

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[1] From Naṁpūtirippāṭŭ, 1963, Volume I.

[2] Vedic education, as here described, was actually not an intellectual education at all, but rather a training in ritual chanting undertaken by Brahmin boys, who had to learn by heart the recitation of their family-inherited Veda so that they would be able to perform the chanting of Vedic verses continually required for the rituals of Brahmin life. Training in Veda recitation started soon after the sacred thread ceremony at the age of about seven and went on full-time for several years with neither pupil nor even instructor having much idea of the intellectual meaning of the words they were reciting. In fact, it was only the very rare scholar who studied the meaning of the Vedas, and this he would do as a highly advanced, special subject of intellectual learning studied many years after learning Veda recitation (i.e. after he had gone on from Veda recitation to learn Sanskrit and had proceeded a considerable way into the higher literature and sciences of traditional intellectual learning). Veda recitation actually created a break in a Brahmin boy's intellectual studies, between primary education in Malayalam and further studies in Sanskrit, but this break was accepted because Brahmins were both priests and scholars in traditional society and Veda recitation was necessary for their ritual, priestly function.

Another fact worth noting about Veda recitation is that traditionally there was a religious ban on writing down the sacred chants of the Vedas, for the Vedas were meant to be *śruti* or 'heard' (as the spoken word is directly heard) rather than *smṛti* or 'remembered' (as the written word is not directly heard but recalls what has been spoken and heard in the past). Hence it is only recently that the Vedas have been put into writing at all, and for thousands of years the Vedas were handed down entirely by word of mouth from teacher to pupil. Yet, despite this long oral transmission without written texts (like thousands of years of 'Irish whispers' from generation to generation), it appears that the Vedas are astonishingly unchanged; because, from one end of India to another, over thousands of miles where other forms of culture show a bewildering variation, the chanted verses of the Vedas hardly vary at all. Given the upheavals and political fragmentations of Indian history, this uniformity of Vedic text was clearly not achieved by the repeated contemporary standardizations of any lasting, country-wide organization of scholars, but rather by systems of checks and counter-checks against variations in transmission (as for example by the exercises of formally recited analysis mentioned in the following historical account).

and education of an orthodox Brahmin boy who did not do particularly brilliantly in his studies.

In order to make suitably coherent reading for the general reader, the following excerpts are abridged and sometimes paraphrased from the original Malayalam account. However, since the ideas and much of the language are the result of translation from the original, the first person singular has been retained.

The daily routine of childhood

Like most children among Nampūtiri Brahmins, until I was a few years old I spent more time with my Nāyar nursemaid than with my mother, and for that reason I was as fond of my nursemaid as of my mother. At night too, I slept next to my nursemaid, right up to my sacred thread ceremony at the age of nine.

On waking up in the morning, she would change my previous day's loin-piece and take me to the tank for a bath. (A loin-piece, incidentally, was all that a Nampūtiri child wore, apart from various ornaments, and for a small child it was made of leaf or wool rather than cotton, despite the discomfort, for reasons of ritual purity). If I was ill and could not bathe, my nursemaid would have to ritually purify me by 'touching water' with both hands each time and stroking me three times from head to foot.

Having satisfied the requirements of bodily purity, she would take me indoors for the day's preliminary rituals. My mother would wet some sacred ash and see that I was properly marked with it. Then came *japaṁ* and *namaskāraṁ*. Japaṁ means ritual recitation and in this case it was the five syllables '*Namaśśivāya*' which were recited. Namaskāraṁ means ritual salutation or prostration, consisting of joining the palms in front of one's body – as in prayer – and bowing or prostrating on the ground. In this case, there were twelve namaskāraṁs to our family goddess Bhagavati, three each to deities of temples our family was connected with, and so on. Each of these namaskāraṁs had its own sacred verse or *mantraṁ*, depending on the deity one was prostrating to. On ordinary days, there were not less than 108 japaṁs and 24 namaskāraṁs; and there were more on special days like birthdays, ritually important days of the calendar, and the month of Karkkaṭaṁ. I had great faith and devotion in such matters.

When all that was over it was time to go to the temple for worship. Carrying the very young children and taking the others along walking, our nursemaid would make us pay our respects at the temple and bring us back. Then the sandalwood paste mark was put on (the centre of the forehead is the chief place for this), and *vayampŭ* and sanctified water were administered. Vayampŭ was a medicinal plant (acorus calamus) ground to a paste and subsequently sanctified during pūja (ritual worship), and it was supposed to increase intellectual capacity. A little of the paste was scooped out on a piece of leaf and, turning to the east and chanting 'Namaśśivāya', it was taken in the mouth and swallowed. Next, taking some sanctified water – and chanting 'Nārāyaṇa' – that too was swallowed. Only then were the religious rituals over; and until then, nothing could be eaten.

One naṟika (twenty-four minutes) before and after sunset, also, was a period of time when nothing was to be eaten. At sunset, after washing face and feet one had to come indoors, apply the sacred ash (in the evening it was applied dry) and, turning to the west, do japaṁ and namaskāraṁ.

In Nampūtiri families, it is customary that only the eldest son marries a Nampūtiri girl. The other sons have marital connections with non-Brahmin women (Nāyars upwards), who remain, with their children, in their own families, visited by their Nampūtiri husbands. However, since my father's eldest brother had no children by his first wife, my father also married a Nampūtiri girl. Subsequently, my father's eldest brother made a second marriage and had three children, a girl and two boys. Thus I grew up with three paternal cousins at home as well as my younger brother and my older brothers and sisters. My paternal cousins were in the relationship of sister and brothers to me: I called them 'elder sister', 'elder brother', 'younger brother'. Since there was only a year or two's difference between my younger brother, my younger cousin and myself, we grew up together as companions, playing and fighting together and learning much of our lessons and our Veda recitation together.

My aunt was fond of telling stories to amuse children, and we children were even fonder of hearing the stories she told. After dinner we simply would not let her go; until we went to sleep we made her tell us stories. She would put us to bed, sit next to us and tell us tales of baby Krishna, Shri Rāma, and others. My mother was too busy with preparing for the rituals, cooking and other household work to have much time for this. Most of the stories from the *Purāṇaṁs*[1] which I read later, I heard and was introduced to at this time.

Primary education

I do not remember in which year my initiation into letters was performed. I can only say that it must have been in my fifth year, after I was four years old. But I have a good memory of that day. In addition to some Vedic rituals, the fifty-one letters of the alphabet have to be written on the tongue with something made of gold. It was my father's younger brother who did that. As a cow's tongue is held pulled out when pouring water in its mouth to make it drink, uncle pulled out my tongue, held it, and wrote on it 'Hariḥ śrīgaṇapatayē namaḥ'. Then he started writing the Malayalam alphabet '*a*', '*ā*', … etc. Before it was over, my tongue hurt and I began to cry. When he realized my trouble, we rested for a while before going on. After that the teacher who was initiating me into letters took my hand and made me write in some uncooked parboiled rice that had been spread out. What was written was the same as on my tongue, the invocation to Gaṇapati and the fifty-one letters of the Malayalam alphabet. All the rice had subsequently to be eaten by me. Since there was a lot of it, just enough was cooked for one meal at a time, and I ate it all in the course of several meals.

My primary education started after this ceremony of initiation into letters and continued until I started Veda recitation after my sacred thread ceremony (which was delayed in my case to the age of nine). My first teacher, who taught me to write and read, was Gōvinda Vāriyar of Kāṇippayyūr Vāriyaṁ.[2] He knew something of the art of calculation (which in those days was largely astrological).

The first lesson was to recite the fifty-one letters of the Malayalam alphabet, and when I had learned it my elders congratulated me. Not merely did I feel happy then,

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[1] *Purāṇaṁs* (Sanskrit form *Purāṇa*) are texts of religious myth.

[2] Vāriyars are a 'temple-servant' caste, intermediate between Nāyars and Brahmins.

but to this day I have not forgotten the feeling that came upon me of pride that I had become a clever person. Coming to my teacher in the morning, and this would be after I had already performed the usual morning rituals, I had first of all to turn to the east and recite the invocation to Gaṇapati, 'Hariḥ śrīgaṇapatayē namaḥ'. Only after that could reciting the alphabet begin. In order to make it easier to recite the alphabet continuously and rhythmically, certain letters were pronounced with a preceding vowel, for instance the letter '*ṛ*' was pronounced '*ēṛ*' and '*ḷ*' was pronounced '*ēḷ*'.[1] I was not aware of this variation in pronunciation at the time; it was only much later that I understood it.

The next lesson was in writing the letters of the Malayalam alphabet in spread out sand. I never wrote on a slate myself, though I saw a few children going to school with slate and pencil (chalk-pencil) in hand. Sitting turned towards the east, one poured out fine sand from the coconut-shell receptacle in which it was kept, spreading it in an area some nine inches to a foot wide and a foot and half to two feet long. The index finger was used for writing, and at first the teacher would hold one's finger and make one write. Four or five letters were learned in a day, each letter being smoothed out before the next was written. And before learning the day's new four or five letters, the previous day's letters would have to be written in order. After the individual letters of the alphabet came the consonant-vowel compounds, which we went through systematically and exhaustively from '*ka*, *kā*, *ki*, *kī*, … to … *kṣau*, *kṣaṁ*, *kṣaḥ*' ('*kṣa*' is the last consonant of the Malayalam alphabet). Here too there was a rule. On spreading the sand, one first had to write the invocation to Gaṇapati 'Hariḥ śrīgaṇapatayē namaḥ' and, without smoothing it out, sit there and recite the whole alphabet. Then only could one begin writing the letters.

After the consonant-vowel compounds, we learned consonant-consonant compounds; though we certainly did not go through any systematic list exhausting all possible consonant-consonant combinations, which I doubt would be even practicable. When writing a letter in sand, it had to be recited aloud, and a few compound letters were pronounced in a special way different from their normal pronunciation, as for instance '*kya*', '*kra*', '*kla*', '*kva*' were pronounced '*kīya*', '*kēra*', '*kēla*', '*kūvva*'. What was the necessity for this I still do not know.[2] That these were simply compound letters, and which letters they combined, I knew only much later; it must have been after my Vedic studies were over and I had begun to learn Sanskrit.

The next lesson after writing in sand was *akṣarasamkhya* (literally 'letter number'), which was a useful way of remembering the veritable universe of numerical formulae in astrological calculation, in the days when books and tables either containing or making unnecessary such formulae were not published. Each syllable was taken to represent a digit (according to the predominant letter in it) and hence each word, taken as a sequence of syllables, would represent a sequence of digits and thus a number. For instance 'Rāman' represented fifty-two, '*rā*' (predominant letter '*ra*') representing five and '*man*' (predominant letter '*ma*') representing two. Hence numerical formulae could be represented in memorized verses, as in some of the astrological verses I learned later on in my primary education. There is no doubt that it was a

[1] 'ṛ' is 'ri' as in 'crib'; and 'ḷ' is 'li' as in 'clip' but with a retroflex 'l'.

[2] Presumably this also must have been an emphatic form of pronunciation designed for learning through oral recitation.

person from Kerala who discovered this technique, and it has spread somewhat through south India apparently, though not in north India I have been informed.

Having learnt to write on sand, one progressed to reading on palm leaf. The verses one was to read were indented on palm leaf with a pointed stylus and given to one by the teacher. To make it easier to read, the indented writing should be stained. A piece of charcoal was rubbed well on the ground and certain prescribed leaves were rubbed on the same spot to make a charcoal and leaf paste, which was applied to the indented palm leaf and then wiped off while it was still wet; so that it would remain in the indented portions only, and the writing would show up black and clear. One usually wiped the palm leaf on one's thighs, and I remember my hands and thighs being blackened by the time the days lessons came to an end.

Reading on palm leaf was a step forward in that, apart from dispensing with the use of sand, one progressed from separate and combined letters to reading continuous verses which had to be recited and learned by heart. First read and learned on palm leaf (in the Malayalam script of course) was the Sanskrit hymn to Gaṇapati that begins with the familiar invocation, 'Hariḥ śrīgaṇapatayē namaḥ', so that on the first palm leaf was written an extension of this invocation.[1] Each verse was numbered after it was written, except for the extended invocation. Since the extended invocation and the following verse of the hymn were recited together without stopping for breath, I got the impression that both together formed one sentence or verse, for naturally I did not understand the meaning. It was only much later, it must have been when I was at Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ (in my late teens and early twenties), that I realized the distinction of the first few words of invocation from the subsequent two lines which constitute a verse proper of the hymn.

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[1] The beginning of the hymn (called *Gaṇāṣṭakaṁ*) is quoted by the author as follows. First the extended invocation 'Hariḥ śrīgaṇapatayē namaḥ avighnamastu śrīgurubhyōnamaḥ', and then the subsequent two verses:

> abhiprētārthasidyartha pūjitōyaḥ surairapi
> sarva vighnacchidē tasmai gaṇādhipatayē namaḥ
>
> ekadantaṁ mahakayaṁ taptakancanasannibhaṁ
> lambodaraṁ viśalākṣaṁ vandēhaṁ gaṇanāyakaṁ

Here is a translation:

The extended invocation, 'Vishnu! Salutation to Śri Gaṇapati! May there be no obstacles. Salutation to teachers!'

The first verse,
Whom even the devas (gods) worship to get their wishes fulfilled.
Scatterer of all obstacles. To you, Lord of gaṇas (Shiva's destructive hosts), salutation!

The second verse,
One-tusked, great-bodied, fiery-gold,
Heavy-bellied and large-eyed. I salute you, leader of the gaṇas.

The author also quotes the beginning of another Sanskrit hymn, called *Mukundāṣṭakaṁ*, which was learned soon after. It starts 'Karāravindēna padāravindaṁ mukhāravindēna vinaveśayantaṁ…', affectionately describing the play of a flower-like baby Krishna putting his toe into his mouth.

After this hymn to Gaṇapati we continued with some more devotional and religious poems, at the rate of one or two new verses (ślōkaṁs) a day. On arriving at class, one first had to recite by heart lessons previously learned. If it turned out that one did not know properly yesterday's or the day before yesterday's lessons, they had to be recited and repeated some more before going on to the day's new lessons. Each day's lesson was written down there and then on palm leaf and handed over to be read and learned. This manner of teaching, and all these lessons, including *guṇapāṭhaṁ* (didactic verses about moral and conduct), constituted the traditional form of education in those days, not only for Nampūtiris but for all caste Hindus (i.e. of rank Śūdra and higher).

There were also many practical lessons composed in simple Malayalam verse, which we had to learn by heart, in particular some verses giving the first lessons in Sanskrit and the verses giving instructions (and containing numerical formulae as already described) in astrological calculation and practice and in calendar and time-reckoning (which was of course very much involved with astrology). It was only later on, when I started learning some actual calculation, that I understood the use of these practically oriented verses which I had learned by heart, and the greatness of our predecessors in constructing them and handing them down as children's lessons.

In those days, clocks and watches had not come into prevalence as today (though we did by then have two old-fashioned pendulum clocks at home) and the most common methods of telling the time were *aṭivākyaṁ* and *nakṣatravākyaṁ*. Most people could tell the time by these methods, as people can today by looking at a watch. For births and deaths of course the time had to be known exactly.

Aṭivākyaṁ was the rule, codified in verse lessons (*vākyaṁ*), for relating the time of day to the length of one's shadow, measured with one's feet. So many steps and so many fingers breadth before or after noon (the Malayalam terminology was *akattaṭi* or *tiriññaṭi* – literally 'inside steps' or 'reverse steps') corresponded to so many *nāṟikas* (one nāṟika is a period of twenty-four minutes) after daylight or before sunset. As today we say the time is 'such and such o'clock', in those days it was sufficient to say that it was so many steps before or after noon for most people to know how long it was after dawn or before sunset.

Nakṣatravākyaṁ was the rule, also codified in verse lessons (*vākyaṁ*), relating the time of night to the position of the stars, in particular to the rising of certain stars. Though not quite so commonly as the time of day told in terms of the length of one's shadow, many ordinary people could understand the time of night when told in terms of the position of the stars. I remember an illiterate family servant in my youth who could tell the time of night like this, just by looking at the stars.

Lessons started after breakfast in the morning and went on until mealtime at about eleven. Then we had a break of an hour or two before the teacher came back from lunch. Lessons started again before two o'clock and went on till five, except on Saturdays when they ended early, five nāṟikas (two hours) before nightfall, a time which we determined according to aṭivākyaṁ, measuring twelve steps of a standing person's shadow after noon.

The day's lessons were concluded by reciting some moral verses and, at first, the alphabet as well. The knowledge that the day's lessons were coming to an end made it great fun reciting the moral verses. I felt some reluctance to go for my lessons, but my mother and elder sister encouraged me and flattered me, saying that I was intelligent and that I must study and become a clever person, so that I got a little enthusiasm.

I do not remember whether it was because of his ill-health or for some other reason, but after a short while my first teacher stopped teaching us and we were taught by Kṛṣṇa Piśāraṭi of Kāṇippayyūr Piśāraṁ.[1] He was skilful in the science of calculation and it was from him that I learned the later lessons of astrology and calendar reckoning in my primary education. He knew how to calculate the astrological calendar (pañcāṁgaṁ) and, as if it were a religious ritual, he would not eat after his daily bath until he had determined what were that day's astrological star and position in the lunar month. Though not quite like people who can read and write today, in those days most better-educated people could tell the astrological star of each day and the day of the lunar month. My second primary teacher tried to teach me this calculation, but I am afraid I did not learn it as well as I should have.

This second primary teacher was good with his hands and, besides knowing some ornamental sewing (for dolls, puppets, decorations etc.), he used to make and give away two kinds of instrument then in current use for measuring the time. The first of these, which I only heard about but never saw myself, was a sort of sand-glass made of coconut shell. The second kind of instrument, of which my teacher made and gave away a few while he was teaching us, consisted in a vessel with a small hole in it, adjusted so that, when placed in water, the vessel would gradually fill up and finally sink in the space of one nāṟika (twenty-four minutes). Immediately after a birth or a death, if the sky was obscured and the time could not be told by the sun or stars, one of these vessels would be placed in water and allowed to sink, the process being repeated till sunset or sunrise, so that the time of the birth or death could be exactly determined.

In those days teachers had great authority over their students. If a student made some mistake which the teacher did not like, he would be soundly punished. Beating with a green switch (a coconut leaf stem), on the thighs or on the palm of the hand, and other punishments were not uncommon, but the severest punishment was pinching with sand, rubbing sand in with the pinch. If one was pinched like that it burned awfully. I saw my teacher punish fellow classmates; but apart from being scolded, I cannot remember my brother, cousin or myself being physically hurt, perhaps because of our high birth. Trusting that it will not be thought that I am simply being superior, I can say that it may also have been because we did not do anything terribly naughty.

Ordinary children in country districts were of course rather poor. If someone was appointed to instruct the children of a rich family, it was common practice to send children from the neighbouring houses there. Even though a teacher would not get much financial earning from this, teachers considered it their duty to instruct as many children as possible. Therefore, only if he could not do otherwise would a teacher send a boy back without accepting him. On the day of initiation into letters and on festival occasions like *Ōṇaṁ* and *Viśu*, children would make their teacher some kind of gift according to their means. It was customary to make the children themselves offer the gift. There were those who gave a small monthly payment, but that was not very common.

All my elementary lessons were learned by heart, and even though there was plenty of printing in Malayalam by then, I learned them written on palm leaf. I think this kind of thing had not become widely available in print. Towards the end, I got a small

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[1] Piśāraṭis are a 'temple-servant' caste, intermediate between Nāyars and Brahmins.

book on the preliminary lessons of astrology, which by then I had already learnt. After that, I started learning *Siddharūpaṁ*, using a printed book. (*Siddharūpaṁ* is the verse text that was traditionally used for teaching elementary Sanskrit grammar.) I learned the conjugation of many verbs by heart, but I was given no instruction as to their meaning. That was the manner of teaching in those days.

It is doubtful whether there was a good bookshop even at the larger towns like Trichur. Books were generally available through salesman who walked from house to house selling the books that were carried in bundles on their backs and heads. The books they brought were mainly Purāṇic and traditional literature (the *Rāmāyaṇaṁ*, the *Bhārataṁ*, the *Bhāgavataṁ tuḷḷals*, *Pattuvṛttaṁ* and so on). Not many new books had come out as yet. The prevalent belief was that they were unnecessary, even useless. Let alone the question of going to one of the new schools on the European model, even the question of studying English had not become a serious issue among Nampūtiris. No one so much as considered it.

Brahmacaryaṁ and Vedic instruction

After the sacred thread ceremony (called upanayanaṁ) Nampūtiri boys entered a period of special observances, called *brahmacaryaṁ*. The sacred thread ceremony is usually at the age of seven, and I felt rather unhappy when other boys of my age had been through their sacred thread ceremonies, while mine was delayed till the age of nine. When my thread ceremony finally took place, I was very pleased. All in all I felt I had become a person of status and worth. But in another way it made for great frustration. The observances of brahmacaryaṁ were so strict, it did not take long to feel that it was a big nuisance.

I had to bathe before sunrise and perform the water ritual called ūkkuka. I do not think I missed bathing and performing this water ritual before sunrise on a single day during the period of brahmacaryaṁ. When my father was at home, he would get up every morning at four o'clock and go to bathe before visiting the nearby temple of Bhagavati, the family goddess. There, he would have the previous day's offerings gathered and thrown away, water poured ritually over the idol and flowers offered; for the members of our family had great faith in this Bhagavati. He usually took me along with him to bathe, even in rainy and the cool seasons, and I had to stand chanting the *gāyatri mantraṁ* until daybreak. The sign of daybreak was that the fine hairs on one's body became visible. With that, the dawn worship (called *sandhyāvandanaṁ*) would be concluded by going indoors, washing one's feet and performing a *hōmaṁ* (fire ritual) called *camata*.

Following camata came japaṁ and namaskāraṁ (ritual chanting and ritual salutation or prostration, respectively). The chief namaskāraṁ just after the thread ceremony was to the 'village' deity, Śukapuŕattŭ Dakṣināmūrtti.[1] Since the village deity's temple was north-west of our family home, the namaskāraṁ had to be in that direction. While everyone was doing their namaskāraṁs towards the east, I felt awkward doing my namaskāraṁ alone towards the north-west, especially when there were

[1] 'Village' here refers to the group of Nampūtiris the author's family belonged to, Nampūtiri families being divided according to the various villages they were supposed to have originally settled in when they came to Kerala.

guests and relations around. And at that time, the days on which our family home was without visitors were few. There were thirty-six namaskāraṁs facing east to the village deity and a few namaskāraṁs to the family goddess Bhagavati and other deities. Finally, I had to recite japaṁ – now consisting of '*Ōm namaśśivāya*' – a thousand times.

These religious rituals after dawn worship and camata were performed between my sacred thread ceremony and the start of Vedic instruction. Once I started Vedic instruction, I did instead some 100 to 150 *sūrya namaskāraṁs*,[1] accompanied by reciting Vedic mantraṁs.

Even after all these morning rituals were over, one was not allowed to eat or drink anything before the main, mid-morning meal. And after that, if one wanted to eat outside mealtimes, one had to throw the food into one's mouth – one was not allowed to hold something in one's hand and eat it, like ordinary children do. When one sat down to eat, if a bit of food from someone else's leaf fell on one's own leaf, one would have to get up and bathe, and go on eating only after that. Supper could only be eaten once, so if at night something from someone else's leaf fell on one's own leaf, one did not merely have to get up and bathe, one could not eat after that, and one went to bed hungry. Once, when my younger brother was being served, a little piece of something rolled off his leaf onto mine. I still remember having to bathe at about eight o'clock at night during the rainy season and going hungry to bed. (Bathing of course was always at the tank, out of doors.) Mother and the others were upset, but there was nothing that could be done about it.

There were many restrictions as to what could be eaten. Horse-gram, asafoetida, onions, fenugreek had all to be given up (but pure coconut oil was allowed). Pappaṭaṁ (a gram wafer fried crisp, and a great favourite) was not allowed, nor were drumsticks (a kind of vegetable), nor anything that had been offered to the gods. And one of the special observances, just after the sacred thread ceremony, was to grow one's hair and not have it cut for a year.

There were more rituals at sunset, called *sandhyāvandanaṁ*.[2] They were followed by the fire ritual called camata and then by japaṁ and namaskāraṁ before supper. One was supposed to sleep with one's head pointing east or south. West was also allowed, but on no account could one sleep pointing north. After the sacred thread ceremony, Nampūtiri boys were taught, along with their morning and evening rituals, a method of counting japaṁ (repeated chanting) on the fingers. It is clear that the main purpose of japaṁ is to centre attention on a single place, on the nature of the worshipped deity. Hence the need for a rather automatic means of counting that does not distract attention, for example a string of prayer beads, or what is equivalent, a method of counting on the fingers. Moreover, counting on the fingers was a necessary technique in learning to recite the Vedas.

After the *saṁāvarttanaṁ* ceremony, the period of brahmacaryaṁ would be over; and until then a Nampūtiri boy wore only a loin-piece: he was not allowed to wear full adult male dress. I was by nature a well-grown boy and felt ashamed to go out without

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[1] A *sūrya namaskāraṁ* means literally a namaskāraṁ, or salutation, to the sun; and it is a kind of ritual physical exercise consisting of some ten yogic *āsanas* (bodily postures) in succession, performed facing the rising sun.

[2] Called by the same name as the rituals of dawn worship.

being more fully dressed. Strangers had begun to tell me to dress properly and to make fun of me for wearing only a loin-piece. It became a source of considerable unhappiness. I wished I could somehow get my samāvarttanam over and done with.

Once the thread ceremony was over, the next important duty in a Nampūtiri boy's life was learning to recite the family-inherited Veda by heart. It was my father's younger brother who started me off in Veda recitation. He did not punish at all, he would let me play a little and would even tell jokes to amuse me. But after a while, he found it troublesome and felt he could not go on instructing me in the entire Veda. There was a Vedic instructor appointed to teach the children of our family, but he was ill, and for the time being we could not find anyone else. So there was a bit of a problem.

My maternal uncles were expert at Veda recitation and one of them was particularly fond of teaching it, so much so that he found it difficult to spend his time otherwise. When he heard of the difficulties in finding me a Vedic instructor, he sent word that he would teach me if I was sent to his home, which was of course my mother's family home. To my delight, the elders agreed, and I spent the next few months with my uncle learning to recite the Vedas.

After five months, I went back home to study with our family-appointed Vedic instructor, who had by now recovered from his illness. After a year, he fell ill again and I was sent with my younger brother and cousin to a relation of his. Our new Vedic instructor eventually came to stay at our home to teach us; but for the next seven or eight months a family observance kept him at his own home, so for the time being we went to stay with him. Near his house, there was a temple where Nampūtiri boys from the neighbourhood would gather, on off days. We played games (marbles, ball games and others), quarrelled, and on rare occasions even came to blows. There were many of us playing about, all equally pleased with ourselves. It was a very enjoyable time. From my friends of that period, only one or two are still alive.

What I have to say now is about Vedic instruction. Its practice is terrifying. Ordinary people cannot even imagine it. To this day, it frightens me to think about it. When the dawn worship and the fire ritual called camata were over, one had to do 100 to 150 sūrya namaskāraṁs[1], and straightaway sit down to recite till lunch time. There were some rituals before lunch, and then immediately after lunch one started reciting again. Reciting went on until the evening rituals at sunset, then again after evening worship till dinner, and sometimes even half an hour or so after dinner. And in the course of all this, except for necessities like going to the lavatory, there was not even a minute's respite. I cannot remember any other period in life of such continuous misery, not merely for a few days for some special reason or other, or even for a few months, but for years on end. The days did not pass by, they only added up on one.

Two single days and one period of four days every month were holidays. The happiness of those days was measureless. The day before the four-day holiday was a happy one, just as the evening of the last day brought a feeling of great sadness with it. However, except on one particular holiday in the month, even on holidays one sometimes had to spend time reciting the parts of the Veda that one had learnt and had forgotten. Because I used to cheat my teacher as much as I could, by not reciting

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[1] See page 34 note 1.

passages the required number of times, I began to forget several parts, and I often had to spend most of an off day reciting.

After my Vedic instruction was over, when I saw relatives or other boys learning to recite the Vedas, I felt great sympathy for them. But, given even this state of affairs, the strong conviction did not leave me that it was wrong not to learn Veda recitation and that everyone should learn. 'For illness to go, medicine must be administered, and it cannot be administered without bitterness.' That was how things were. At a meeting of Nampūtiris in 1925, by which time many Nampūtiri boys had started going to Nampūtiri school, a Nampūtiri student made a speech to the effect that in future even Nampūtiris would not have to recite the Vedas; it was enough if everyone went to school. To tell the truth, I was quite astounded. My chief worry was that, with so much work and money spent establishing a Nampūtiri school, Nampūtiri boys had become such disbelievers.

In those days, there could not have been one in ten Nampūtiris who did not know how to recite the Vedas. A Nampūtiri who did not know Veda recitation felt himself socially inferior and would feel ashamed to go to a place where other Nampūtiris gathered. Generally, at the end of their religious rituals Nampūtiris would chant the Vedas and make their namaskāraṁs. A Nampūtiri who could not recite the Vedas would often want to go bathe somewhere else while this was going on, and come back at mealtime as if nothing had happened. In Nampūtiri society of that time, those who could not recite the Vedas had the same sort of inferior status as those who could not read and write.

To give another example of this state of affairs, in a book describing rituals to be performed by Nampūtiris, the Vedic mantraṁs were not given in full. Only the first and last four syllables were quoted, for it was assumed that all Nampūtiris knew, and would in future know, their family-inherited Veda by heart.

When something was chanted to me I could repeat it, but it was difficult for me to learn it by heart. To learn it properly, I had to repeat it a great many times, and even so I would easily forget it again. Eventually, I somehow did manage to learn the required basic recitation of the whole Veda; but because my sacred thread ceremony was delayed, and for other reasons, my basic Vedic instruction was not complete before the samāvarttanaṁ ceremony. Clever students and keen reciters learn the basic recitation (samhita) in three years, and so complete their training one or two years before samāvarttanaṁ (usually at the age of fourteen). In my case I had to go on with basic recitation for more than two years after samāvarttanaṁ.

Marriage and further studies

Like Kālidāsa's 'vedābhyāsajaṭaḥ',[1] until my marriage I knew little about any subject outside my Vedic instruction, and I had little experience of the world outside my home and my mother's family home.

In 1908, at the age of 17, I was married to a girl of the family of Tampurāns (princes) at Trippūṇittuṟa.[2] I was told that I was going to be married a week or two in advance; and on the determined date I was taken to Trippūṇittuṟa, on the second

[1] Literally, 'stupified or made dull by Vedic exercise'.

[2] Near Cochin, 60 to 70 miles south of the author's family home in Kunnaṁkuḷaṁ.

railway journey I had made in my life. At Trippūṇittuṙa, after a bath and supper, I was taken to my wife's palace, where I remained for a while with a Nampūtiri and some others who were passing the time cracking jokes. I was shy and bewildered and said nothing. Then at nine o'clock someone gave me a flower or two, and I was taken to my wife's bedroom.

That was the marriage. I had of course never seen my wife before, I did not even know her name, nor how old she was. I had not so much as chatted with a girl before, apart from my elder sisters and cousin, and in any case I was naturally a rather shy boy. For some time after the marriage, I was too overcome with embarrassment to talk to my wife in the presence of others. I wonder if there has ever been such a young and unceremonious marriage.

According to the usual custom whereby a Nampūtiri forms a marital connection with a non-Brahmin girl, the girl stays at her family home and her Nampūtiri husband visits her there.[1] A few days after my marriage, by which time I had begun to enjoy the comforts of the palace and my new position in having a wife, I returned to my family home. I had not yet learned fully by heart the last parts of basic Veda recitation, and I expected to go on studying with my teacher as before. But although he did not say anything, I felt a change in his manner towards me, and it became clear that he was withdrawing from teaching me any further. For the future I would have to go to Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ, the Veda recitation school at Trichur, or elsewhere.

I also felt a change in the attitude my family elders had hitherto taken towards me, as a mere boy learning Veda recitation. Until then all I had to do was recite the Vedas on working days and play about on holidays. When I found myself sitting idly, without reciting the Vedas on days that were not meant to be holidays, I felt this was leading a worthless life. I was especially uncomfortable when my teacher and family elders saw me like this, As well as the usual fear and respect my teacher inspired in me, whenever I saw him I felt like a purposeless idiot. And, in addition to all this, I felt a pull like an iron magnet at being separated from my wife. So I spent four or five anxious and troubled days worrying about what to do. Finally, I decided to stay at Trichur Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ. First I went back to my wife's house for three or four days, and from there I went straight to Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ.

I was at Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ from 1908 to 1913 (between the ages of 17 and 22) with a year's interval after my father passed away in 1910. On holidays I went to my wife's home, and on special days like birthdays I went to my own family home. I had great respect for Veda recitation and great admiration for those who were expert at it, but I did not put very much serious effort into learning it myself. I was more interested in enjoying myself and in making a place for myself among the boys, which was made easier for me because I was of good family and my elder brothers had done well at the Maṭhaṁ before me.

My stay at Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ brought about something of a transformation in me. I became less confused and shy in the presence of other people, less dependent on

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[1] The children of such a marriage belong to the mother's family and are thus non-Brahmins. the husband remaining something of an outsider to his wife and children, This is a lesser kind of marriage for Nampūtiri Brahmins, who also marry Nampūtiri wives, this latter kind of marriage being a more permanent relationship in which the children are Nampūtiris and belong to the husband's family. See page 28.

my family elders and teachers, and I felt something of a sense of freedom. Previously, I had to get my elders' permission for any sort of journey, and they would send someone to accompany me. Now I felt I could go anywhere I liked, without any of this. I was released in many ways from restricting botherations, and there came a sense that I was a free person. One day I left home for Trichur without asking permission of my elders. To this day I can remember the contentment of freedom which I felt when they not only showed no displeasure, but sent no one to accompany me, even though they knew I was going.

At that time, there were as many as 200 students at Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ. Everyday conveniences and comforts of life were rather poor. The water in the pond (for bathing) was very bad, and so were the food and the facilities for an oil bath. Despite this, I very much enjoyed this period of being with so many boys of my own age. Almost everyone was good natured and helpful; we shared a common purpose; there was no one to be so frightened of; we were all free; and thus, for many reasons, I can say that it was the most continuously happy period of my life. Just as the preceding period of Veda recitation, before I joined Brahmasvaṁ Mathaṁ, was the most miserable.

Trichur Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ is said to have been founded in the eight century A.D. by disciples of Shri Shankara. It provided free instruction in higher Veda recitation (for the *Ṛg Veda*) and free food and residence to boys from an association of Nampūtiri families from four 'villages' (Ālattiyūr, Panniyūr, Śukapuṙaṁ and Trichur).[1] Other Nampūtiris who visited there were also fed and lodged free, and it was famous not merely in Cochin but throughout Kerala, though fewer people have heard of it today.

The students could come and go from the Maṭhaṁ as they pleased, without having to take special permission or to register their presence and absence. Every day at four or four-thirty in the morning we would get up and bathe, and after the usual dawn rituals we would start doing *sūrya namaskāraṁs*[2] accompanied by chanting passages from the Vedas. Some did sūrya namaskāraṁs lasting the recital of one *ōttŭ*, some for two, three, upto four ōttŭs. Few boys did no sūrya namaskāraṁs at all. Depending on its length, the recital of one ōttŭ took one through 120 to 200 sūrya namaskāraṁs. It must have been the morning bath and these sūrya namaskāraṁs, providing hygiene and exercise, which kept the boys in good health.

Immediately after sūrya namaskāraṁs we would sit down to recite, chanting in groups of eight or ten students, sometimes more. We went on reciting till lunch, then immediately after lunch till evening worship at sunset, and after that till supper. It would be nine-thirty by the time worship at the nearby temple and supper were over. Except for some ten holidays each month, that was our daily routine. Instruction was meant for higher studies in Veda recitation, after the basic recitation that was supposed to have been learned at home. At the Maṭhaṁ, students would go on to recite formal analytic exercises on text, breaking it up into words (called *padaṁ*) and recombining the words in different ways (called *jaṭa* and *ratha*).

Every student's goal was to pass the examination held annually at Kaṭavallūr, where students from Tirunāvāya Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ (Trichur Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ's

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[1] See page 33 note 1.

[2] See page 34 note 1.

traditional rival) would also compete. There were internal examinations at Trichur Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ to test whether students were fit to be sent for the more public examination at Kaṭavallūr. I did not go up for the Kaṭavallūr examination in my first year, but after that I went up three times. However, I was never selected as one of the successful candidates.

The teachers and the students at Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ did not ask for any financial pay or reward. The ideal was simply to fulfil the two duties required of Brahmins, to learn and to teach.

I left Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ when I was twenty-two, and started staying at my wife's home in Trippūṇittuṟa. I felt a sense of emptiness away from the companionship and the fun at the Maṭhaṁ, and that increased my desire to continue my education and study something more. There was a Nampiyār at Trippūṇittuṟa who had been appointed to teach the palace children (Nampiyārs are a 'temple-servant' caste, intermediate between Nāyars and Brahmins). He was good Sanskrit scholar; and when I expressed a wish to learn Sanskrit, he agreed to teach me. So, together with a Nampūtiri friend of mine, I started learning Sanskrit from him.

By this time, some young Nampūtiris had begun to realize that it was not a sin to study English and moreover that it was a necessity. I too wanted to learn some English and when I was considering how to manage it, Kelappan Tampurān (one of my wife's relatives) very kindly offered to teach me. So as his pupil I studied a little English as well. Had I stayed there at Trippūṇittuṟa much longer, I would have gained a working knowledge of Sanskrit and English, but unfortunately circumstances made it impossible for me to stay. In 1917, at the age of twenty six, I said goodbye, very painfully and reluctantly, for my wife and I were very fond of each other, and went to stay at home.

At Trippūṇittuṟa I completed only the elementary lessons of Sanskrit and English. Circumstances at home did not allow me to learn English there, so I could not continue with it. But it is of course much easier for Nampūtiris to learn Sanskrit, and my elementary lessons helped me get some working knowledge of the language, much more with Sanskrit than with English. Moreover, my elder brother taught me a little more Sanskrit, in particular *Kumārasaṁbhavaṁ*.

Family elders

Father's elder brother (1832-1917). Many Nampūtiris of those days were simple souls with little business capacity, who had inherited only such personal characteristics as peacefulness, honesty and an incapacity to conceive that others would cheat. But not my uncle. He was a first class manager of his time. In his youth, the family fortunes had been in a very bad way, for my grandfather was apparently the innocent minded kind of Nampūtiri I have just described. My uncle started looking after the family estates when he was sixteen or seventeen, and he rescued the family fortunes out of trouble. My father and his younger brother both agreed that their eldest brother's capacity, in addition to his seniority, made him the right person to be in charge of the family estates.

Uncle was greatly skilled in talking tactfully to people. He could easily spend hours being charming to people, to each in accordance with his social status. Anyone who happened to be introduced to him, and talk to him for a while, would go away feeling that he was a fine man, affectionate, dignified and capable.

He did not know much Sanskrit, only just enough to have studied the science of architecture, which was our family speciality. Besides Veda recitation, that was all he had been able to study, because he had started looking after the family estates while he was still so young. We children felt both affection and trepidation towards him, for he was the kind of person who would find out exactly what was necessary and do it at the proper time. And there was a gravity in his manner which meant that we did not have the courage to play the fool or be obstinate when he was around.

Incidentally, my uncle would eat his main meal at about nine o'clock in the morning. Normally, perhaps apart from children, Nampūtiris did not have their main meal until eleven. Because in our family we ate our main meal before ten, I think other Nampūtiris must have had some fun at our expense, that we were a house without religious rituals. (Many religious rituals are performed in the morning, before the main meal.)

Father (1839-1910). Father was by nature a somewhat stern man, easily stirred to anger and quick to scold when some mistake was made. He was not the type to fondle and play with children, and we were not able to behave without some trepidation in his presence.

In general, it is not in the Nampūtiri character to fondle and be indulgent towards children. If others are seen doing it, it is considered a piece of foolishness. When other people are present, Nampūtiri women behave as though they speak to their children only in order to scold them. Women and children are paid more respect among those who follow matrilineal descent, especially Nāyars. (Nampūtiris are patrilineal.)

Father was considered among the first rank of intellectual Nampūtiris of his time. His special fields were architecture and astrology. In astrology, his interest was more in the calculations and the reasoning than in prediction. There was a book called *Yuktibhāśa*[1], which though written in Malayalam was supposed to be on a very difficult subject. I have heard it said that my father was one of the very few people in Kerala who understood it all. He was also fascinated by the science of calculations in *Līlāvati* and knew all the calculations in that book.

Father had a very good friend of similar intellectual stature, Rāghava Vāriyar of Kaṭṭukulattu Vāriyaṁ.[2] He and my father had not only affection but the greatest respect for one another. From time to time, Vāriyar would come to our home for two or three days. When he and my father met each other, they were lost in delight and would often forget even food and sleep, talking all the time, usually about some profound questions in the subject of astrology. On several occasions I saw tears pour from their eyes in excess of joy, when they had been able to discover and understand together some principle which neither of them had been able to grasp until then.

For many years, father was superintendent of the Cochin State department concerned with building work for the palaces and temples belonging to the state. I remember staying with him at Trichur (where he was working) and seeing the town. He was exempted from formal office hours and working days, but in 1896 when the young Raja came of age, there was a change in the government of the state and my father was made to follow formal office hours and working days like everyone else.

[1] Literally, 'The language of reason'.

[2] Vāriyars are of 'temple servant' caste, intermediate between Nāyars and Brahmins.

Then he decided not to continue with the job and resigned, in which year I cannot remember. He also went to stay at Trivandrum on several occasions to give advice about the building of palaces there.

Father had, besides, an aptitude for painting and music. The temple of our family goddess Bhagavati was within our compound, and on one of its walls my father painted a picture of Bhagavati (using as paint suitably coloured gravel stones ground to a paste, for paint was not yet freely available in the market). Unfortunately, he fell ill and became bedridden (in 1905) before he could complete the picture. Before he fell ill, I often heard him play the vīṇa, in which he had both interest and skill.

Father's younger brother (1841-1919). My father's younger brother was a very pure man. He was married to a non-Brahmin lady from a neighbouring house, but he and his wife had no children of their own, which may have been why he was so fond of children. He could not bear to see any of us crying; he would immediately call us to him and cheer us up. He always kept some sugar and sweets in his room and would buy us toys and nice things to eat. Our chief remedy for the usual miseries of childhood was to call uncle and go crying to him.

He went once a month to Guruvāyūr temple for worship. He would get up early in the morning, perform the essential rituals and start out by bullock cart for Guruvāyūr, which was five miles from home. It took an hour to get there. I would stubbornly insist that he took me along too, and since he was unable to say no to a child's wishes, I usually went with him.

Uncle had only a little knowledge of Sanskrit, but he was proficient in the science of architecture and in astrological calculations. Printed calendars and almanacs were of course nothing like so widely available then as they are today. From when I can remember, we had an almanac at home, the *Paṭṭāmpi Pañcāṁgaṁ* published by the great scholar, astrologer and doctor, Punnaśśēri Nampi. An agent would bring it every year. But before that, when no published calendar was available at home, my uncle used to calculate each month's calendar in advance and carry it in his head. This was not so surprising at a time when paper had not come into use for writing.[1] Having worked out the month's calendar in advance, uncle could reply on the spot when people came to him – as they did for dates and times and astrologically related calculations concerning our household and lands, and even for the neighbouring Nampūtiri households. When we did have an almanac at home, and people came to my uncle, he would still reply without needing to look up the almanac, for he used to look it up in advance and keep two or three weeks details in his head. In intelligence he was not at all in advance of his two elder brothers, but his memory was amazing.

He also had some interest and skill in carving, and he possessed a chisel and other tools. He was adept in various decorations and ornaments for kathakaḷi dancing and he used to make us play-things like small dolls and elephants.

My father and his two brothers were very free and open in their behaviour towards one another. Sometimes they would be arguing so forcefully and loudly that strangers would, think there was a quarrel going on. Then suddenly the atmosphere would change and resound with laughter. Sometimes they made fun of each other, some-

[1] Palm leaf was used for accounts, records. letters etc., but it was much more cumbersome than paper.

times they criticized each other, but that was their normal behaviour, none of it affected the brotherly love and good-fellowship that lay behind it. The phrase ‘like the laughter of the Kāṇippayyūr Nampūtiris’ even became a witticism among friends and relatives.

My eldest brother (1878-1921). My childhood memory of my eldest brother is that he was studying Veda recitation at Trichur Brahmasvaṁ Maṭhaṁ and came home only on birthdays and other special days. He was well advanced in Veda recitation and did well at the competitive examination held at Kaṭavallūr. And he was a fine Sanskrit scholar.

After his Vedic studies he spent some time at Koṭuṅṅallūr (Cranganore) studying Sanskrit. The Koṭuṅṅallūr palaces were still famous as a centre of learning, functioning something like a Sanskrit college and providing free instruction for students. For Nampūtiris, free food and residence were provided as well. Koṭuṅṅallūr and Kūṭallūr (Nāṙēri) were known as synonyms for centres of learning, and the families of both these places had accepted teaching as their family duty. My brother undertook a special period of worship (*bhajanaṁ*) of twelve days at the temple of Koṭuṅṅallūr Bhagavati (the goddess of Koṭuṅṅallūr).

After studying at Koṭuṅṅallūr, my brother went to stay at my mother’s family home, to study under a famous Sanskrit scholar who had been appointed to teach my maternal uncle’s cousin. My brother had some facility in composing Sanskrit and Malayalam verses, and he and my maternal cousin competed in composing extempore verses on a given theme and meter. They were both very clever, and became great friends.

In 1899, my brother married a Nampūtiri girl by whom he had two sons and a daughter, and in 1907 he married a second Nampūtiri girl by whom he had three sons and two daughters. He was well known for his knowledge of architecture and astrology, both of which he studied under my father. Unfortunately, father fell ill (in 1905) before teaching him astrological prediction. In 1909, my brother (who was then 31) and another Nampūtiri started the *Yōgakṣema* almanac; and after that many people kept asking him to look at their horoscopes etc., which he could not do, not having learned the predictive part of astrology. Finally, in 1913, it was arranged that Śaṅkara Vāriyar (a student of my father’s great friend Rāghava Vāriyar) should stay at our home to teach my brother astrological prediction and to learn architecture in exchange. After that, they became such close friends my brother would go nowhere without him.

My two paternal cousins were less interested in studies of this kind. Their aptitude and attention was in management. My elder cousin and myself studied the theory of architecture but were unfamiliar with its application. My eldest brother was so brilliant and had made such a name for himself that we were not called upon to make much effort in this direction.

The daily life of a Nampūtiri gentleman[1]

It may be interesting to give here a programme of a Numburi's[2] everyday life – that of one of the simplest, quietest and the best conducted gentlemen I know of in that community. He rises an hour or so before daybreak and proceeds to the bathing ghat where, after preliminary ablutions, he bathes and says his prayers. Returning home at about 8 o'clock, he recites the rest of the prayers and offers up sacrifices to the sacred domestic fire. Then comes the study of the *Bhagavadgita*, and after that the recital of certain hymns and mantras. It takes him till midday to finish all ;:,~ this and sit to breakfast. On days of anniversary ceremonies or when there are guests with him, it takes him so late as 2 o'clock sometimes to sit to the morning meal. The meal over, he recites certain portions of the *Ramayana*, walking. He next lays himself down for a while, but does not sleep during the day. This is followed by the reading of the *Bhagavata* and other sacred books, and the reciting of prayers and the holy name of Rama. The evening bath then engages his attention. The oil bath, too, is generally taken in the evening. This and the subsequent religious services take up about another 2 or 3 hours. Then comes the supper – either a light one of cakes and sweetmeats or at times a substantial meal at about 8 PM, and lastly the retiring to rest at 10 or thereabouts, after once more repeating the sacred names. This programme is followed more or less by hundreds of other Numburis in the land, which will show the reader the ideal towards which the whole community gravitates.

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[1] Quoted in Nagam Aiya 1906, Volume II, p. 285, from an 1891 census report by the author.

[2] 'Numburi' is a (rather inaccurate) transliteration of 'Nampūtiri'.

2. A Man of Letters in Modernizing Kerala

Traditional education and subsequent career[1]

K.V. Mūssatŭ, known for short as 'K.V.M.', was born in 1888 at Erumaṅṅāṭŭ deśaṁ in Ponnāni tālūk (five miles from Paṭṭāmpi, near Guruvāyūr). His family had traditionally been martial by profession, with the ceremonial function of sword-bearers accompanying Naṁpūtiri Brahmin marriage processions. They were just lower than Brahmin in caste rank, following Nampūtiri Brahmin customs and ways of life except for Veda recitation. K.V.M.'s grandfather and uncles were traditional estate managers and his father was an Ayurvedic physician. He himself became a leading student of the great scholar Punnaśśēri Nampi, playing an active part in literary movements of his time that were concerned with translating and interpreting Sanskrit works in Malayalam and with developing Malayalam and modern Sanskrit literature and education.

The following account is the result of translation and adaptation of excerpts from the Malayalam original.

Childhood (up to the age of twelve)

Being the long-awaited eldest son of the family, I was brought up with great affection. Apparently I showed much keenness for the naughtinesses of youth.

Usually children were initiated into letters at the age of three, but, as it turned out, I was initiated into letters only at the age of five. A fine thread of memory from that day remains undissolved in my mind. The teacher makes an offering to Gaṇapati, writes the fifty-one letters of the alphabet on the child's tongue with a gold coin, and makes the child write the letters of the alphabet in spread out parboiled rice (the uncooked grains). After this ceremony of initiation into letters, a child begins daily lessons of 'writing on the ground' in spread out sand. The index finger is used for writing, with the middle finger kept folded back. It was my family elders who taught me to write the model letters in this way.

When eye and hand were trained through writing on the ground, a child learned to read on palm leaf. The first reading was not as it is today, through single words like 'taŕa' and 'paŕa', but through simple *stōtraṁs* (verses of praise to deities etc.) written on palm leaf. Such primary lessons were taught either at home by an appointed teacher, or at local schools to which the children were sent. There was no proper formal division of classes at these schools. Lessons were conducted with children sitting together who could have been separated into three or four classes. One lot of students would be reciting one verse, other students would be reciting other verses, and the atmosphere of the school would resound with the resulting confusion of noise. Discipline had to be maintained among the children by a cane in the teacher's hand.

Fortunately, I did not have to go near such a school. My father's maternal nephew stayed at our home and taught me my first lessons. He taught me some *aśṭakaṁs*

[1] From Mūssatŭ, 1966.

(poems consisting of eight stanzas, here in praise of deities), *vākyaṁ* (lessons in verse, here mainly astrological and astrologically related for calendar reckoning etc.), *aṭivākyaṁ* (verses for telling the time of day by the length of one's shadow[1]), a small part of *Amarakōśaṁ* (the standard verse dictionary in Sanskrit) and so on. Next, a teacher called Mūtteṭattŭ Kṛṣṇan Nāyar was appointed to teach me. He tried to teach me *Amarakōśaṁ* by heart and to calculate '*nālōkkaṁ*' (a calculation of the astrological calendar). But although some *kavaṭi* shells were obtained to teach me some calculation, I had no great interest in the subject.

My aptitude for unruliness did not decrease even after my formal education started. Holidays are of course a time of license for naughtiness. When one holiday was over, the hurry was to know when the next holiday was coming.

I still remember an incident from the time I was studying *aṭivākyaṁ*. We children were taken twice a day to worship in the neighbouring Shiva temple. At that time the temple surroundings were lying filled with jungle and bush. Within the compound wall, on the north side of the building around the central shrine, is a waist-high granite stone. There is a legend that it is a *svayambhū* (self-generated) *Śivaliṁgaṁ* (phallic symbol, representative of the god Shiva), and that long ago, when a woman sharpened a scythe on it, she saw blood. One evening when mother took me to worship I climbed onto this svayambhu (self-generated stone) and pee-ed. Loudly crying out 'Aiyo!' my mother caught me by the hand, pulled me down, and gave me four blows on the back. I lay there curled up in a ball saying all sorts of unpleasant things to my mother. Today there is a separate little shrine and a daily offering for this sacred stone. And, as for the hearsay that the sacred stone will grow in the course of time, no evidence at all is to be seen!

My mother passed away when I was only seven years old. In her absence, my aunt (my father's elder brother's widow) took her place, with my old grandmother sharing some of the responsibility. The year of observances after my mother's decease and the burden of looking after us young children put quite a strain on them. What worried them most was keeping us children, who walked about as we pleased, from becoming ritually or socially polluted.

It was a time when ritual pollution and social untouchability were openly practised. If one touched outsiders one had to bathe. One could not put one's foot within a Śūdra's gate (Nāyars have the caste rank of Śūdra). Carpenters caused ritual pollution within fourteen feet, Ceŕumāns (Pulayans) within sixty feet; not to mention the Paŕayans and others. Once, when the carpenter brought an *Ōṇaṁ* bow (*Ōṇaṁ* is the harvest festival), in the natural excitement of youth I rushed forward to go and get it, so that a small doubt arose whether I had transgressed the prescribed distance that should be kept from the carpenter. For that reason, I was made to go out and bathe at full dusk in the pouring rain.

After studying upto *Amarakōśaṁ* (the Sanskrit verse dictionary), I remained for some time without any lessons. My studies started again after *upanayanaṁ*, the sacred thread ceremony. My sacred thread ceremony was performed as required, at the age of eleven. Until the *samāvarttanaṁ* ceremony, I was an '*upaniccuṇṇi*'.

The life of those days was unforgettable alright! One had to observe rules like not climbing trees, not swimming, and, when one sat down to eat, saying nothing except

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[1] See page 31

in Sanskrit. This last rule was most irksome. One had to say 'bhōjanaṁ' for rice, 'upadamsaṁ' for curry, 'jalaṁ' for water, 'lavaṇaṁ' for salt, 'takraṁ' for buttermilk, and so on. If one saw a woman in her period one had to bathe; if it was one's mother one saw like this, one had to look at a dog and bathe! After a few days of the above regimen, my samāvarttanaṁ was performed and I became an '*uṇṇimūssatŭ*'.

In those days the countryside was full of fun. On special occasions like Ōṇaṁ (the harvest festival), grown-ups as well as children took part in various amusements. The children played ball games and so on, and the grown-ups played games like dice, chess and cards. There were also special entertainments conducted at particular places, for which experts were often brought over by local men of importance. In the summer season, *kathakaḷi* performances were commissioned in many places (kathakaḷi is the prevalent dance-drama traditional to Kerala). Father had a great interest in kathakaḷi, and if there was a performance anywhere within four or five miles he would set out for it after the mid-day meal, usually taking me with him. (Kathakaḷi performances start late in the evening and go on for most of the night.)

Even though I had reached twelve years of age, my old unruliness did not leave me. It was never possible for me to sit quietly anywhere. One day when I was playing on the front verandah, my sacred thread broke, all three strands being severed through. My father's younger brother was sitting looking on. He leapt up from his seat as though the sky had come crashing down and he gave me a good blow on the side of the head. I fell to the ground writhing both from the force of the blow and from the panic of my broken sacred thread. 'Go, get into water up to your neck and stay there. I shall twist a new sacred thread and bring it,' said my uncle, making me do as he bid. It was as long as two hours before I could put on the new thread and get out of the water!

There was also another incident like this. One evening I was playing with a kitten, raising it upto the top of the wall and letting it fall. I was trying to see if what was said was true, that 'A cat falls only the right way up.' Though the kitten did land right way up five or six times, the following time it died. On this occasion too, my uncle was sitting on the verandah. '*Nārāyaṇa*, *Nārāyaṇa*.[1] Take it and throw it away outside the compound, have a bath and come,' he said, calming down and comforting himself that tomorrow a *paśuddānaṁ* (a ceremonial gift to a Brahmin) would be made in expiation of the sin. The very next day he brought a Nampūtiri Brahmin and had me make a gift of eleven paṇaṁs (coins) and a new cloth, prostrating at the Brahmin's feet. Many people used to say in those days that 'Killing a cat brings a shaking hand.' Though my hand did not shake for the next two and a half decades, subsequent to that the saying did become actual experience for me!

Educational deliberations (at the age of twelve)

When I was twelve years old, considerations started about my future education. My father, as a reputable doctor, was of the opinion that it would not be a bad thing if I was taught *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* (a classic Ayurvedic text) and started off on a doctor's profession. My father's younger brother, who was an estate manager, argued that it would be a good thing if my handwriting was improved and I was taught some ac-

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[1] 'Nārāyaṇa' is one of the names of the almighty god Vishnu.

counting, so that I could in due course become an estate manager. My grandfather and elder uncle had been senior managers for the estate of the Nāṟēri (Kūṭallūr) Brahmin family. Some few properties saved from their earnings were the only financial support our family had. Given these circumstances no one felt my younger uncle's opinion to be unreasonable. But changing conditions in estate management made uncertain what education was required for it, and so my uncle gave in to my father.

Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ (the Ayurvedic text) cannot be studied without a general knowledge of the Sanskrit language, and for that it was necessary to learn *Siddharūpaṁ* (a classic verse grammar in Sanskrit) and to start lessons in reading Sanskrit verse. To this effect, I began studying as a pupil of Śaṅkaran Nāyar of Eḷavaḷḷi Valiya Vīṭŭ, an old and neighbouring Nāyar family.

The state of education in the country (about 1900 A.D.)

At that time the light of education had not spread through the countryside. Village people had little opportunity for education, in either the traditional or the new fashion. The new type of schools were only in the towns. If one wanted to learn Sanskrit or something else in the old style, those who knew how to teach were very few. And even fewer among the common people had the thought that their children should be taught something. The inhabitants of the countryside lived stifled and constricted by an environment of landlordship and Brahmin supremacy. Most of them lacked economic and social power, Not only my family, but other Mūssatŭs and others in general did not aim for any education beyond that required for serving the landlords and managing their estates.

The geography, history and arithmetic in most people's education was confined to what they knew of the land-owning families. Geography consisted in knowing which family owned land in which places; history consisted in repeating the stories of great men who used to live or were still living in the land-owning Nampūtiri families; and that such and such a landlord had so much paddy to collect was accounting. With that, most people's education ended. The landlords who ruled the country held on tightly to the maxim that literacy was not suitable for Śūdras (Nāyars) and lower castes. They liked seeing poor people's huts around their palaces. It was at such a time that I started lessons in Sanskrit verse.

My first Sanskrit teacher (from the ages of twelve to about fifteen)

My new teacher was a very pure and good man. He had a good general knowledge of the world and a special knowledge of astrology, and he was always ready to use his knowledge in a way that was useful to others. Although he was the head of his family, he had entrusted all business affairs to his successors and was living alone in the rice storehouse. He would bathe in the early morning and spend some time in meditation and yogic exercises. Then he would start *nāma japaṁ* (reciting sacred names) and when that was over he would read the *Addhyātma Rāmāyaṇaṁ* in the Sanskrit original.[1] His students would arrive for their lessons before the reading was over. Punctu-

[1] The *Addhyātma Rāmāyaṇaṁ* (literally the 'Spiritual Rāmāyaṇa') is a medieval Sanskrit version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, emphasizing the aspect of bhakti (spiritual devotion) towards Rāma.

ally at ten o'clock, his sister would arrive at the rice storehouse with rice and curry. After his meal, lessons started without delay. There would be a break in the lessons only if someone came to have their horoscope examined or to fix an auspicious time for something. He had great affection for his students and he did not merely teach books, but explained many verses about the principles of life and living.

I studied with this teacher for a period of more than three years. I first learned *Siddharūpaṁ* (a classic Sanskrit grammar composed in verse), *Bālaprabōdhaṁ* (a Sanskrit grammar in Malayalam verse, usually learned together with *Siddharūpaṁ*) and *Samāsacakraṁ* (a text on word-compounds in Sanskrit). After I had learned them all thoroughly, I started *Śrī Rāmōdantaṁ* (an extended poem about Rāma). Then the teacher began teaching some students *Śrī Kṛṣṇavilāsaṁ* (an extended poem about Krishna) and he started teaching me *Raghuvaṁsaṁ* (Kālidāsa's extended poem about Rāma's dynasty).

In those days if one wanted to buy a book one had to go to Guruvāyūr at Ekādaśi (a special day of the lunar month in the Hindu calendar) or to some other special place. I was able to obtain a copy of *Raghuvaṁsaṁ* only after I had finished studying some three quarters of the first sarggaṁ (canto), copying it down from a book in the teacher's possession. When I got this book of six *sarggaṁs* (cantos) printed in the grantha script, my happiness and satisfaction was beyond words. I studied the whole book under the teacher.

One day, when my father saw the teacher, he said: 'My son's studies are getting bogged down. Let him start *Māghaṁ* next.' But the teacher did not have the book *Māghaṁ* in his possession, nor could he obtain any copies. So, for the sake of a book, my studies were disrupted for five or six months.

Introduction to Malayalam literature (at the age of about fifteen)

During this period, while I remained at home without any lessons, I got my first introduction to Malayalam literature. My uncle (my father's younger brother) had no great knowledge of Malayalam literature, but he was a sensitive man interested in reading few old books in Malayalam. He spent most of the month on the estate of which he was a manager, but he also spent some days at home, and in order to read on such occasions of leisure he had obtained and kept some *tuḷḷals* (narrative verse written for a solo dance-drama performance called *tuḷḷal*) of Kuñcan Nampiyār, the *Bhārataṁ* (Eṟuttacchan's classic Malayalam version of the *Mahābhārata*), *Kṛṣṇagātha* (a classic narrative, in relatively simple Malayalam verse, of the life of Krishna, emphasizing the aspects of human love and affection), and the *Pancatantraṁ* (a classic collection of fables, originally in Sanskrit). I found it entertaining to read them during my free time.

Since I did not have the warmth of sensibility needed to appreciate *Kṛṣṇagātha*, it was mainly the other books that I read. Of the *tuḷḷal* stories, I learned '*Kalyāṇasaugandhikaṁ*', '*Kirātaṁ*' and '*Naḷacaritaṁ*' (all three are stories from the *Mahābhārata* epic) largely by heart. I had seen plenty of *tuḷḷal* performed by Govinda Vāriyar at Periṅṅoṭṭŭ festival, and when no one was looking I would sing and mime in the *tuḷḷal* fashion parts of '*Kalyāṇasaugandhikaṁ*' and '*Kirātaṁ*'. My father insisted that I read Eṟuttacchan's *Bhārataṁ* (the *Mahābhārata* epic) at bedtime for a period of two nāṟikas (a nāṟika is twenty-four minutes). However much I read the parts describing Abhimanyu's battle or Arjuna slaying Bhagadattan, I never had enough. In short, the

reading I did then sowed the seeds of literature in my mind. And certain chants and songs in the style of *tuḷḷal* began to go deep into my heart.

Towards Punnaśśēri (at the age of fifteen or sixteen)

Whenever my teacher saw my father or my uncle, he would remind them about my studies. One day he said to father: ‘It is a pity that your son should be sitting idle like this. The best thing would be to send him to Punnaśśēri. There are well-organized arrangements for studying there.’ Father hummed his assent to that, but he was phlegmatic man in conducting his affairs, and he did not show very much enthusiasm for taking me to Punnaśśēri. Then in the month of Mithunaṁ, Shri Śaṅkara Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭan, a friend and a fine scholar, happened to come to our home on his way to Punnaśśēri, which is some four of five miles away. When he asked me about my education, I told him of the idea that I go to Punnaśśēri. ‘Then come along today. I will see the teacher (at Punnaśśēri), talk to him about it, and make the arrangements for your studies’, he said. Somehow he got my father to agree and took me with him that very day.

From then on, I became one of the Punnaśśēri students. That day’s journey and my first meeting with my new teacher (Punnaśśēri Nampi)[1] are unfadingly pictured in my heart. He asked: ‘You are the son of the temple property manager Kuñcu Mūssatŭ aren’t you? What is your name? What have you studied? Who taught you? What is it you fancy learning?’ I answered these questions very shyly. When I told him that it was the Eḷavaḷḷi teacher who had taught me, he was very pleased. And when he knew that my father wanted me to study *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ*, he said: ‘That’s something which is needed alright. And together with that you must study some verse. ‘Then he called a student and told him: ‘Śaṅkuṇṇi, didn’t you hear, this Mūssatŭ child has come here to study? It is your responsibility to do the needful for him.’ This student was Shri U.P. Śaṅkuṇṇi Mēnōn (‘U.P.’ for short), who subsequently became my dear friend.

Education at Punnaśśēri (from the ages of fifteen or sixteen to nineteen)

U.P. arranged for me to eat at the unkempt *maṭhaṁ* (inn) of an elderly Brahmin lady, ten or fifteen minutes walk along a winding path full of thorns and stones. And at night I slept in the upper part of the Punnaśśēri rice storehouse. Though I found the arrangements for food a bit irksome, I was so enthusiastic about my lessons that I did not bother about it much.

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[1] The author, K.V.M., does not directly refer to his teacher by name, and the bracketed interpolation of the teacher’s name is of course the result of translation and editing. Avoiding the use of a personal name is a traditional mark of respect towards teachers and others for whom a high degree of respect is due. K.V.M. refers to his previous teacher as ‘Eṟuttaśśan’, the derivation of which implies the sense ‘teacher or father in letters’. K.V.M. refers to his new teacher, Punnaśśēri Nampi, whom he is just meeting, as ‘Gurunāthan’, meaning literally ‘teacher-master’ or ‘teacher-lord’. He continues this appellation – which has a sense both of reverence and affection – throughout the autobiography, and it has been translated as ‘the teacher’ or ‘our teacher’ or ‘my teacher’, for lack of a better alternative.

Next morning, U.P. and I started learning *Māghaṁ*. There was something special about our teacher's lessons. He taught according to a student's ability to understand what was heard. If the student could understand what was said, our teacher would elaborate a little. Otherwise, he would abbreviate it.

The order in which a verse lesson proceeds is of course *ślōkaṁ* (reciting the verse itself), *padacchēdaṁ* (splitting the continuous line of verse into words), *vibhakti* (identifying the inflection of each word), *ākāṁkṣa* (identifying the relations between the inflected words), *anvayaṁ* (putting the words of the verse into a standard 'prose' order that emphasizes the relations between words and makes it easy to pick out the meaning), *anvayartthaṁ* (reciting the re-ordered sentence with Malayalam terminations of grammar but with the same Sanskrit vocabulary), *paribhāṣa* (substituting Malayalam equivalents for the Sanskrit words and hence arriving at a formal Malayalam translation of the verse), and *sāram*[1] (an informal explanation and commentary by the teacher on the meaning and significance of the verse).

When identifying the vibhakti (the inflection, i.e. the conjugation or declension) of each word, our teacher insisted that we recite all the inflections of the word from first to last (as given in the verse grammar *Siddharūpaṁ*). Sometimes, we were asked the inflections of words that were not in the verse. The word 'pati' arose in a phrase from *Māghaṁ*, 'śriyaḥ patiḥ', and after we had finished declining it we were told to decline the word 'śrīpati'. When we recited 'Śrīpatya, śrīpatibhyām, śrīpatibhiḥ', the teacher laughed and said: 'I didn't ask for the declension of "śrīpati" for nothing. Depending on whether or not "pati" occurs by itself, there is a difference in the third declension onwards. Although the word "śrīpati" ends with "pati" it is declined like the word "kavi".' After that, we never made the mistake again.

In studying *Raghuvaṁśaṁ* (with my former teacher), I had not recited the analysis of compound words, nor had I been made to read a commentary on the text. My new teacher started me on these two from the beginning. If we heard something from our teacher, we would never forget it. The start of lessons brought a new light to us.

But I could not get used to sleeping at night in the rice storehouse. The teacher went to sleep at nine o'clock and then my companion, Kuḷappurattu Rudran Nampūtiri, and I would also go off to bed. Near the rice storehouse were some huge mango trees, the haunt of ill-omened night birds whose harsh sounding cries would start at nine-thirty and continue for half an hour or more. This was an unfamiliar experience for me, and very frightening. I burrowed under the covers and lay praying '*Nārāyaṇa*, *Nārāyaṇa*.' My companion would be snoring from the moment he lay down. So I spent a couple of nights without much sleep, and after three days a slight fever started. The fever did not let up on the fourth day, and the teacher sent someone to take me home.

What happened when I arrived at home is matter for another story. My grandmother and aunt ruled – according to ritual principles – that having been in the public ferry boat, I was ritually polluted. Hence I could not enter the house without a complete bath (hair included). My father (who was after all a doctor) ruled – according to medical principles – that in that case I had better stay in the rice storehouse, because a person who has fever cannot be made to bathe. So there was something of a tug of war between them. Finally, the medical judgement won. It took seven or eight days

[1] 'sāraṁ' literally means 'essence' or 'significance'.

for the fever to pass, and during that period any household member who touched me would have to take a bath.

As soon as the fever was over, I went back to Punnaśśēri. When he came to know the reason for my fever, the teacher said that in future I should not sleep in the rice storehouse but in the printing press – with Vāsu Nampi, a bright student studying *Kaumudi*, to keep me company and help me find my bearings.

The teacher had bought the printing press when the periodical *Kērala Śōbhini*, run by Kuññuṇṇi Eṟuttacchan, had closed down. Now it was being used to print the *Paṭṭāmpi Pañcāṁgaṁ* (almanac), the Sanskrit weekly periodical *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi*, the Sanskrit book series *Sāhitya Ratnāvali*, and some small books. Thus the press was something of a playground of scholarship and literature, and staying in it redoubled my own eagerness for learning, making me feel as though I had entered some new world.

Two or three months passed by, and our studies made normal progress. We began to get some familiarity in composing sentences and conversing in Sanskrit, because the teacher made us practice and apply in our own words the particular linguistic usages that arose while we were studying Sanskrit verse. We were also avid readers of many books in the printing press that were conducive to general knowledge. It was about this time that I wrote my first published article, which came out in the Malayalam monthly *Sāhitya Cintāmaṇi*. When I saw my name in print in the monthly, my mind was lost in delight, and after that my taste grew for writing articles in periodicals.

We started learning *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* (the Ayurvedic text) on Vijayadaśami day that year. Vijayadaśami was notable in that most of the teacher's old students would gather for the ceremony of initiation into letters, in which at least a hundred or a hundred and twenty persons would prostrate before the teacher and be ceremonially initiated by him into learning. A fair sum would be offered as *gurudakṣiṇa* (offering made by a pupil to a teacher). This gurudakṣiṇa was, incidentally, the only financial contribution a Punnaśśēri student was expected to make.

The Navarātri period (of which Vijayadaśami is the tenth day) was quite a festival at Punnaśśēri, with a proliferation of student debates, speeches and *akṣaraślōkaṁs* (verse quoting competitions). And I got the opportunity to see some of the teacher's foremost disciples. On Vijayadaśami day, the teacher gave a feast for all the students; and afterwards everyone gathered for a meeting at which there were plenty of Sanskrit speeches by the students and finally a speech by the teacher in the form of some advice. What a festival that day was! It makes one feel that 'Those good days are over.'

For some eighteen months, my studies continued without much interruption. By then I had finished four sarggaṁs (cantos) in *Māghaṁ* and one sarggaṁ in Naiṣadhaṁ (Shri Harṣa's extended poem), and I had come more than half way in the *Sūtrasthānaṁ* of *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ*. Through reading books, papers and monthly periodicals, I had acquired some information about the world. A few papers from Calicut, the Koṭṭayaṁ Manōrama, a couple of monthly periodicals, and some Sanskrit papers used to come to our teacher, and I was their caretaker. Because of some time that went in reading papers I had to face a little difficulty attending to the repeated recitation of previous lessons. The teacher insisted that the previous day's verses from *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* be recited by heart on the following day, and I sometimes had to miss up to half the night's sleep memorizing them. At three in the morning the teacher woke up and came to the press, and I could not very well go on sleeping after that.

One day the old lady at whose maṭhaṁ (inn) I used to eat suddenly left the place without telling anyone, a week after taking her monthly advance of money and rice. When I went to the maṭhaṁ for my usual meal, the door was locked. And there was no other way of getting my food in the immediate neighbourhood without offending the laws of caste and custom. But none of this put a stop to my studies. I ate and slept at home, walking the five miles to the printing press after the morning meal, and starting back for home at about four thirty in the afternoon. I would not usually eat anything at midday. If I was very thirsty I could not even drink plain water without purifying myself by a bath (having been ritually polluted in the course of the journey to the printing press). This went on from Dhanu (December-January) to the end of Minaṁ (March-April). I found the morning's journey a hardship, but returning in the evenings was fun. The Bhārata river would be guilded gold in the evening sun and the surrounding sights refreshed both eye and heart. In the gently blowing breeze that came washed over the river's waves I would murmur all sorts of poems to myself, and feel the journey light up my imagination.

When I returned to lessons after the Viśu festival (Viśu is on the first day of Mēṭaṁ, the month after Mīnaṁ), the teacher said: 'If you walk eight or ten miles getting here and back every day, your studies won't come right. If you will cook your own food here, I will get you the rice, the utensils and other things that you need.. That will be alright if you take on the work of proof-correcting for *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi* (the Sanskrit weekly) and of writing addresses. Ask your father and act accordingly.' This pronouncement of the teacher's was a blessing as far as I was concerned, and my family felt the same way. From the next day, I was staying in the printing press again, cooking and eating there. I had no great difficulty correcting proofs and I would sometimes read them sitting next to the fireplace where the rice was boiling. Writing addresses was the difficult job, because in the first place my handwriting was not good and in the second place I did not know the English alphabet. However, helped by U.P. and others, I managed it somehow; and in a month's time I had learned the English alphabet and could write addresses on my own.

At about this period, we had the good fortune of a rare meeting. It was about ten in the morning. Our teacher had arrived after his meal and was copying some recently made calculations of the astrological calendar into a book. He was sitting, as usual, on a plank seat in front of a kind of low desk, writing on it with a feathered quill. We students were standing outside, waiting to be called in for lessons, when we saw a new visitor arrive. He was middle-aged to look at, quite short and round of body and light of colouring, with short arms and legs, a piercing gaze, and a bearing that told you he was afraid of nobody. As he approached, U.P. recited, loudly enough for him to hear, a line of verse from an Ōṇaṁ festival song: 'Didn't you see? By my count he has eaten well for three and four people.'[1] He laughed, and went straight inside.

As soon as he saw him, our teacher got up and greeted him: 'Why, Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ, how long it's been since we last met! You've come from home haven't you? By train? But then you haven't bathed or eaten yet.' He replied 'By train alright. These days I travel mostly by train.' And he went on to produce one of his usual witticisms. Our teacher then dismissed us students, saying that there would be no more lessons that

[1] This is a kind of chiding compliment, among people for whom it is not fashionable to be thin, but who consider it a sign of prosperity and well-being to be generously filled out.

day, sent someone to accompany Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ to the bathing tank, and returned home.

After twelve o'clock, the two of them came together to the printing press and after a little rest the conversation started, fascinating U.P. and me into remaining there in our free time without going off to play, like Vālmīki's disciples when King Janaka came visiting their hermitage. Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ was a fine poet and humorist, who would not leave aside his witticisms no matter whom he spoke to.

At about four o'clock a young poet came to see Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ. He had been to Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ's home to ask his opinion of a newly written work, and had followed him here. Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ made him read out some verses from the work. Worrying that his listener might not understand the verses at first hearing, the young poet read them at a crawling pace. 'Don't labour it like that', said Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ. 'I can understand it all.' Reading out a verse with the phrase 'candrakala' (meaning 'the crescent moon,' 'moonlight' etc.) in it, the poet said: 'Here the phrase "candrakala" has two meanings.' Without waiting to hear any more, Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ shot back: 'To me it seemed that it had sixty-four meanings, not two.'

The poet was taken aback, for he had not even dreamed that his use of the phrase had so much meaning. Very humbly, he asked that the meanings of 'candrakala' be described. Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ started his exposition: 'One, the crescent moon seen in the sky; two, the crescent moon emerging from rain clouds; three, the crescent moon adorning Tṛpraṅṅōṭṭappan (the deity of Tṛpraṅṅōṭṭu temple, Shiva, one of whose emblems is the crescent moon); four, the crescent moon adorning Vaikkyattappan (the deity of Vaikkyaṁ temple, also Shiva). And so we can talk of the crescent moon adorning sixty-four Shiva temples. There are lots of Shiva temples in Kerala, aren't there?'

At this, the poet said he would visit later, and left the place somewhat abashed. Our teacher could not help but remark that Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ had been a little over-harsh. But Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ argued that he had not been too harsh at all, considering the pestilence of half-baked poets swarming forth like cockroaches after new rains.

When he was leaving in the evening, Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ pointed to me and asked: 'Who is this child with the sacred thread?' Our teacher told him my name and family. 'Is that so? I know the Kaypaḷḷi family. They are connected with us,' said Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ, and called me to him.. 'You must study very hard and become smart, d'you hear!' he said, giving me a couple of slaps on the back. The words of a nephew of long ago came to my memory: 'Uncle, let me become smart gently.'

Soon after, the scholar P.S. Anantanārāyaṇa Śāstrikaḷ[1] came to stay with us. He arrived with his household goods, his bundles of books, and an old lady relative of his mother's walking in front of him. Our teacher knew him well and welcomed him happily as a writer for the weekly *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi*. He was put up in a small, newly constructed house near the printing press. The increasing arrival of new students made our teacher unable to teach everything himself. He decided that he would teach astrology and medicine, and that Śāstrikaḷ should teach poetry and drama. Śāstrikaḷ was quite willing, and started teaching, in the school fashion, ten or fifteen pupils in the upstairs of the printing press. U.P. and I were the advanced pupils,

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[1] 'Śāstrikaḷ' is a plural, honorific form of 'Śāstri', used commonly in Kerala for Brahmin scholars of Tamil origin.

studying under Śāstrikaḷ upto the third sarggaṁ (canto) of *Naiṣadhaṁ* (an extended poem), the play *Śākuntaḷaṁ*, and upto *Sandhitrayaṁ* in *Laghu Kaumudi* (a simple text in the theory of grammar).

Then our teacher conducted an examination for U.P. and me in three subjects, poetry, drama and grammar, which Śāstrikaḷ had taught us. I got ninety marks in poetry and drama and six marks out of a hundred in grammar. U.P. got ninety marks in grammar and thirty-five in the others. When the examination was over the teacher said to me: 'You don't have to struggle studying grammar. Just study the other subjects.' I asked unhappily: 'How can I speak or write Sanskrit without grammar? Is it your judgement that I shouldn't attempt that either?' 'Hai, that's not it. It's just books on grammar that you don't have to study. You can develop a working knowledge of grammar from practice.'

There is a Sanskrit verse, 'Prāyēṇa vaiyākaraṇān piśācan prayōgamantrēṇa nivārayāmaḥ', meaning that grammarians are a kind of devil that can be exercised by the *mantraṁ* or spell of practice. That was in effect the teacher's reply. From that day on, I made it a rule to study carefully the grammatical usages that I came across, and to put them into practice whenever the opportunity arose.

Our teacher also decided that Śāstrikaḷ should help with editing the weekly *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi*. 'Help with' turned out to mean that Śāstrikaḷ actually carried out the editorship, which he did very well. Meanwhile, Kastūriraṅkācāryan – a noble friend of *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi*'s and an established Mysore scholar – passed away, and Śāstrikaḷ and I wrote some verses about him. The teacher's opinion was that Śāstrikaḷ's verses showed more knowledge of the *śāstraṁs* or in other words more theoretical knowledge, but that mine showed more taste for poetry.

Another great scholar who came to visit us was Abhinavabhaṭṭabāṇan A.R. Kṛṣṇamācāryar. He was from the Tamilnad and he had been for some time Malayalam pundit at a college in Trichinopoly. He had learnt Malayalam in three months in order to take up the position, and in the course of time he had become an authority and a writer himself in Malayalam literature. He had been invited to Kerala by C.K. Kṛṣṇaguptan, to teach Kṛṣṇaguptan's nephew the theory of grammar; and he had received the title 'Abhinavabhaṭṭabāṇan' in Kerala at a literary meeting convened by Mānavikrama Ēṭ́ṭan Tampurān of Calicut, for condensing into a small book Bāṇabhaṭṭan's extensive prose poem *Kādambari*.

In the week that Kṛṣṇamācāryar spent at Punnaśśēri, our teacher and Śāstrikaḷ had time only for discussions on grammar. Both Kṛṣṇamācāryar and Śāstrikaḷ had seen the far end of grammatical theory and both had a natural gift for argument. Their arguments gave them such mutual respect that Kṛṣṇamācāryar took Śāstrikaḷ back with him to Trichinopoly to help prepare educational and scholarly books for publication. Kṛṣṇamācāryar was returning to Trichinopoly after four or five years in Kerala, and he had come to Punnaśśēri to say goodbye to our teacher. Our teacher told him that though he was leaving Kerala, Kerala would never leave him.

I was impressed not so much by Kṛṣṇamācāryar's theoretical learning and knowledge in the *śāstraṁs* (theoretical texts), as by his heart-felt Malayalam poems. It was he really who prompted me to compose my first poem in Malayalam, written when I went to stay with my maternal uncle. It was a stanza of praise to the goddess of the locality, worshipped in the kind of garden shrine that is called a 'kāvŭ'.

After Anantanārāyaṇa Śāstrikaḷ had left, the work of looking after the Sanskrit weekly, *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi*, was entrusted to me. Our teacher wrote the foreword and

I examined the articles, writing many of them myself under the pen name of Sūkṣmadarśi (‘Exact viewer’). I also wrote articles in Malayalam for various periodicals, and having read some of them to the teacher, I asked him about a pen name to publish them under. He suggested ‘Ka Vā Mū’, the Malayalam initials of my name, but being progressive minded I did not like that too much. In that case the English initials ‘K.V.M.’, (written in Malayalam as ‘kē vī eṁ’) would do, he said, which made me happy. Afterwards he would not address me except as ‘K.V.M.’.

Our teacher liked going to literary meetings, and he usually took me along with him. I remember going to an annual meeting of the Pariṣkārābhivarddhini society organized by the Vaḷḷattōḷ family to encourage literary arts among the young; to the literary gathering that Vāsuṇṇi Mūssŭ’s family conducted every year for the *Pūraṁ* festival at a temple in their estate; to the Eṟuttacchan Memorial Conference convened under the chairmanship of Mānavikrama Ēṭ́ṭan Tampurān at the neglected estate that was Eṟuttacchan’s home; and to a meeting of the Ārya Vaidya Samājaṁ (‘Traditional Indian Medical Association’) at Vidvān Eṭamana Kṛṣṇan Emprāntiri’s home at Trichur.

At these conferences I had the opportunity of meeting some of the leading literary figures of the time, and in particular I remember meeting Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān of Koṭuṅṅallūr (Cranganore) at the Ārya Vaidya Samājaṁ meeting at Trichur. That was the period of his life when he was translating the *Mahābhārata* (metre for metre into Malayalam verse); and wherever he went he would spend a couple of hours after his morning bath and rituals composing the translation, dictating as he went along to someone he had got hold of to write it for him. He called this writer Gaṇapati (after the god who is supposed to have written the *Mahābhārata* at Vyāsa’s dictation).

After that morning’s translation Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān and my teacher chatted for a while, and subsequently I was introduced to him. He was very pleased when he heard that I had a taste for poetry and literature, and he tested me a little, quoting two Sanskrit verses on a similar theme and asking me which one was superior. From the expression on his face when I gave my answer and my reasons, I fancy that he agreed with me, though he could not contradict my own teacher, who disagreed with me, for fear of giving me a swollen head.

Our teacher also took students studying medicine along with him when he went to treat patients, and students studying astrology along with him when he made a journey to examine horoscopes, and so on. On one such medical visit to the home of a retired Karnatic Brahmin at Karūr, I was accompanying him along with Śāmu Mēnōn, a fellow student, and on the return journey by train we found all the compartments full except one in which there was only a young man in western clothes. As our teacher made to enter the compartment, the young man caught him by the throat and pushed him. Had I not been behind to support him, our teacher would have fallen to the ground. At that point Śāmu Mēnōn lost his temper and in a flash he had leapt into the compartment through the window, caught the young man by the throat, and pushed him back so that his head struck painfully against the opposite door.

After that we remained unmoved despite all the provoking things the young man said against us, for our teacher told us to say nothing in reply. When the young man’s temper had cooled down a bit he became quiet, and we started reading the Sanskrit play *Mudrarākṣasaṁ*. Before the train reached ‘E Road’ Station, the young man apologized to our teacher for his rash behaviour, and our teacher in turn apologized for the lack of judgement his students had shown. They parted as friends. By the time

the train reached our station (Paṭṭāmpi) early next morning, we had finished reading our play.

The above incident took place just after I had come to the end of my lessons in *Aṣṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* (the Ayurvedic medical text), which we studied together with *Cikilsākramaṁ*, *Sahasrayōgaṁ*, and other medical texts. U.P. and I took and passed an examination in *Aṣṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* conducted by the Ārya Vaidya Samājaṁ ('Traditional Indian Medical Association'), thus earning ourselves certificates and the status of 'Upavaidyans'.

Early career (from the ages of nineteen to twenty-three)

At the age of nineteen, I left Punnaśśēri to stay at home, and the period of my life devoted exclusively to my education was at an end. My education genuinely followed the ancient Indian ideals of the *gurukulaṁ* (guru – teacher, kulaṁ – family): in which teacher and pupils lived together as a family, and the pupils served the teacher with a devotion similar to that for the divine, according to the ancient precept 'Acārya devo bhava.' ('May your teacher be your god.')

I had to leave my teacher and come home for a good reason: my family's declining financial situation. The family rights in property were in a disadvantageous and deteriorating position, and the income from them was insufficient to meet our expenses. My father and uncle had earned a bit in their prime, but enough only to meet the expenses of the time. My father's medical practice did not contribute much in the way of income apart from the pearl-like tears of gratitude that fell from poor patients' eyes; and so he had also engaged himself in the management of temple property, but he had withdrawn from it empty-handed as he did not have much of a sense for management and accounting. My uncle did have a good sense for management and accounting, but because of an eye ailment he did not earn much to speak of from it any more.

That left me as the next potential earning member of the family; and if I remained without a profession that brought in some sort of income, things would come to a sorry pass. But I knew no regular occupation other than literary activity, which in those days was a pastime of the leisured rather than an earning profession. So, to help me get some experience in applying the medical theory that I had learned from my teacher, I started by writing out my father's prescriptions and treatments for his patients. As things turned out I did not get the chance to acquire much practical ability in the science of medicine, for which I have often felt the pangs of regret.

One day, not having travelled far from home for quite some time, father took me along with him on a visit to treat a patient at the home of the Dēśamaṁgalaṁ Nampūtiri Brahmins, who were a family interested in reading books and periodicals as a means of acquiring knowledge and information about the world. Ceṙiya Nārāyaṇan Nampūtirippāṭŭ (the eldest son of the head of the family) was enthusiastically establishing a small printing press and starting a Malayalam monthly, and Anantanārāyaṇa Śāstrikaḷ, who had taught me at Punnaśśēri, was there to help with the monthly. The Nampūtirippāṭū had heard of me through Śāstrikaḷ, so that when my father introduced me, he was very pleased and asked for my services in connection with the printing press and the monthly. My father and I both agreed, and without much further delay I was staying at Dēśamaṁgalaṁ and working for the monthly, called *Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ* (meaning 'The rise of good fortune'), which soon brought out its first issue. The work

brought me into contact with men of intellect and learning, and I was back in the world of literature and scholarship again.

While I was at Dēśamaṁgalaṁ I acquired a reasonable knowledge of the Tamil language, and in particular I read, in Tamil translation, Bankim Chatterjee's *Ānandamaṭhaṁ* novel and a collection of Bipin Chandra Pal's Madras political speeches. Both these books made a great impression on me and brought many new ideas and ideals to my mind.

One day, my father and a friend of his arrived at Dēśamaṁgalaṁ to tell me that my marriage had been decided and that we had to be in time for the initial ceremony early next morning. They did not even tell me where the bride was from, but I knew about it from another source. My fellow student U.P. had written to me that my father had gone to Punnaśśēri to ask the teacher to look at the horoscopes and fix an auspicious time for the marriage. The girl was a sister of 'P.V.M.', who had been for a while our fellow student at Punnaśśēri, specializing in astrology and highly regarded by our teacher in the subject of astrological calculation.

The marriage took place at the time fixed by my teacher. Kaṇvan's advice to Śākuntaḷa was that the most important of the virtues required in a girl about to become a bride is a sense of *guruśuśrūṣa* (devoted service to teachers and elders, as people of knowledge and experience). The abundance of this virtue in my wife made a light task of my family responsibilities. For the time being, she stayed at the family home and helped look after the elders there.

The *Yogakṣema Pañcāṁgaṁ* (astrological almanac) that is now printed annually and widely used in Kerala, was first published from Dēśamaṁgalaṁ press; and since it spread among all the important families in Kerala, it helped our monthly periodical's name to become quickly famous. There were two difficulties confronting Malayalam periodicals and bringing many of them to an end soon after they were started. The first difficulty was the lack of their own printing presses, which did not apply to us. But we had to work hard against the second difficulty, the lack of writers.

It was a period of transformation in Malayalam literature. More than a few people had studied and achieved learning in Sanskrit, but not many of them could apply this learning in Malayalam in a way that was useful to ordinary people. Quite a few people had studied English and passed advanced examinations, but most of them were contemptuous concerning Malayalam, and their sense of being progressives made them reluctant even to write letters, let alone articles for periodicals, in Malayalam. Those who should have written did not write, and those who did write often did not know how to write at all, so that workers for periodicals like ours had to keep trying to encourage suitable people to contribute articles. A considerable effort was made to persuade English scholars to write in their own language, and there came to be a few writers at least writing in Malayalam on the new subjects.

The town of Trichur was a major centre for Malayalam literature, with many important printing presses publishing from there. When I was staying at Dēśamaṁgalaṁ, working for the *Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ* monthly, I had to visit Trichur for about a week every month to consult with Kocci Rāmavarma Appan Tampurān and Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān, who were helping with the periodicals. I had already met Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān, but not Appan Tampurān, and since the latter was a member of the Cochin royal family I was a little worried as to how I should conduct myself towards him. The moment I saw him, however, my fears were at an end, for he was a man of high ideas and humble life, who had in full measure the virtue of approachability. I learned

a lot about writing prose and verse from these two Tampurāns, and with their help I gradually felt less lack of confidence walking the main road of literature with my head held high.

One day when I visited Appan Tampurān at his palace, he showed me a palm leaf manuscript and said: 'This is a rare book. It's written in Sanskrit and it includes a grammar and an account of the poetics of the Malayalam language. It's called '*Lilātilakaṁ*'. It wouldn't be a bad idea to translate it and publish it in *Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ* (our monthly periodical)'. The same day, after the light afternoon meal, we started on the translation. The Tampurān would read each verse and dictate its translation in the same metre, for me to write down. From the next issue onwards, *Lilātilakaṁ* was published in instalments in the *Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ* monthly, but we had to stop publication after the first *śilpaṁ* because few among our readers had the ability to appreciate its greatness. However it can certainly be said that *Lilātilakaṁ* has since been referred to by many great scholars in Malayalam.

By the end of the monthly's first year, its proprietor Ceṙiya Nārāyaṇan Nampūtirippāṭū undertook certain other responsibilities concerned with the affairs of landownership, and he had not the time as before to look after the affairs of the monthly and the printing press. So he and Appan Tampurān considered together how to establish an institution that would keep the periodical and its work going. At this time the printing press and publishing rights of *Kerala Kalpadrumaṁ* at Trichur came up for sale; and Appan Tampurān, Dāmōdaran Nampūtirippāṭū and some others bought over the press and started a company with the name of 'Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ'. Twenty-two months after the *Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ* monthly started, the Dēśamaṁgalaṁ press and the monthly were transferred to this company. I too went to Trichur in the service of this company, on the small salary of fifteen rupees a month, for the company was hard pressed for money in its early stages.

I stayed together with a friend called Keśavan Nāyar, and for two hours at night we would both study Patañjali's '*Yōgasūtra*' from the Government High School headmaster, Shri Chāttanāṭṭu Śaṅkuṇṇi Mēnōn. One day he told us that the school needed a good Sanskrit scholar and asked if we knew of anyone. We told him of P.S. Anantanārāyaṇa Śāstrikaḷ, who was subsequently appointed Sanskrit pundit at the school.

I returned home after a year. My small salary and the added expenses of town life made my stay there something of a financial loss, but the town life had been worthwhile in another way, for it had opened my eyes a little where previously I had been simply orthodox about day to day affairs. When I returned to the country, I found I had to watch carefully how I behaved. The rules of ritual pollution at home struck me as a bit of nuisance, and when I went out the restrictions and requirements concerning social contact and pollution struck me as quite shameful. But I was also a little afraid to act against accepted custom, so I remained somewhat on the fence.

Because I felt bored wasting time idly at home, I got a small job with the help of the Dēśamaṁgalaṁ family. The job consisted in writing the accounts of the same temple property trust of which my father had been manager. The salary was only six rupees a month, but it was better than nothing. Since I had no skill in writing accounts, I got a clerk from the Dēśamaṁgalaṁ estate to do the work, giving him part of the salary at the end of the year. The rest of the money went to the Dēśamaṁgalaṁ family, towards repaying a debt my father owed them, and I was relieved of the job.

Back at Punnaśśēri, teaching in the newly organized Paṭṭāmpi Sanskrit College (from the ages of twenty-three to twenty-eight)

Then one day came a letter from my teacher, taking me immediately to Punnaśśēri again. As a result of my teacher's and Vidvān Mānavikrama Ēṭṭan Tampurān's long efforts, the Sārasvatōdyōtini school which my teacher had been running had been elevated to the status of a college from 3 June 1911, by recognition of Madras University. Students had already joined the college for the Madras University Vidvān examination to be held in 1915. My teacher wrote telling me this and that he intended to appoint me as a teacher. It goes without saying that I was only too pleased to obey his wishes, and from the very next day I was appointed teacher of poetry at Sārasvatōdyōtini Sanskrit College, on a salary of twelve rupees a month. I ate most of my meals with my teacher himself, so I did not have to go out to the old lady's maṭhaṁ (inn) as before. And because of the many upper level students now staying in the environment of the college, there was no lack of available conveniences and comforts. Whatever doubt I was faced with, my teacher was always ready to put an end to it for me. I was grateful for having acquired a job which suited my inclinations.

Only four students were being taught for the final examination in 1915, including Shri U.P. Śaṅkuṇṇi Mēnōn (my old fellow student) and Shri K.V. Mānan Gurukkaḷ, both of whom had already achieved proficiency in Sanskrit, being prompted to join the college only by the wish to earn a University degree. My work in their class was to make them practice translating from Malayalam into Sanskrit and from Sanskrit into Malayalam. To students in the intermediate stage (in the so called 'advanced' classes) I had to teach *Raghuvaṁśaṁ*, *Kirātārjjunīyaṁ*, *Mēghasandeśaṁ* and other verse works. I was also entrusted with the work of running the Sanskrit weekly *Vijñāna Cintāmaṇi*, being given the status of a 'sub-editor'.

Our teacher was a man who attached significance to the traditional *varṇṇāśramaṁ* division of different castes and stages of life. In his own personal matters, he observed the traditional customs of untouchability and pollution; but he did not think that untouchability or pollution applied to Sarasvati Devi, the Goddess of learning; and he was ready to teach anyone who came to learn Sanskrit, irrespective of caste or religion. In the interests of the advancement of depressed classes, he wanted to teach some lower-caste students in the Sanskrit college.

But not one person came forward to learn Sanskrit from among the lower caste classes of Paṭṭāmpi and its surrounding areas. The local Īṟavas, and others considered to be of lower caste, had come to believe that they did not have the right to learn Sanskrit, and that if they attempted to take this right in opposition to ancient custom, the authority of the Nampūtiri Brahmins and the Tampurāns (the traditional ruling families) would be offended. In solution of this difficulty, our teacher obtained a proclamation from Vidvān Mānavikrama Ēṭṭan Tampurān stating that there was nothing against Sanskrit being taught to everyone together, irrespective of caste and religious distinction. But there was still no response to speak of from the neighbouring areas, and in despair our teacher wrote to his respected friend Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmikaḷ (the Īṟava leader), who sent some lower caste students from Travancore State to join the college.

By the time the college started there had been quite a transformation in the place. Previously, there had only been the building called the printing press. Now, just north of it was a two-storied bungalow of the traditional Kerala type, and a little towards the

south a large college building had come up. The teacher had moved from his family house, and now ate and slept in the two-storied bungalow. After his morning worship and calculation of the *pañcāṁgaṁ* (astrological calendar and almanac), he would be ready to teach many different students. At ten o'clock, he would go to the college in his capacity as principal and teach some of the higher classes.

He was insistent that lessons be carried out with Sanskrit as the medium of conversation as far as possible, which put a few teachers who came from other places into some difficulty. The college literary society was organized in two sections, a Sanskrit *Sabha* and a Malayalam *Sabha*, both of them with lectures and student meetings every week. The Sanskrit Sabha helped provide the practice in spoken Sanskrit that our teacher insisted upon, and many students came to show an ability for conversing and writing compositions in Sanskrit. I found it both pleasurable and profitable to make sustained Sanskrit speeches and to put the Sanskrit language to practical use.

Mānavikrama Ēṭ́ṭan Tampurān's '*Ariyiṭṭu vaṟca*' (the coronation ceremony of the Zamorin dynasty that ruled Malabar from Calicut before the Mysore invasion and the advent of the British in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries deprived them of their power) was celebrated with due pomp at Kōṭṭaykkal East Palace, and our teacher took along a few of his pupils, including myself, to it. Arrangements had been made by the famous literateur Shri P.V. Kṛṣṇa Vāriyar, editor of *Kavana Kaumudi*, for a book of verse describing the various parts of the ceremony, complete with the history that was signified. Each of several poets was entrusted to write a section, and the poems were to be composed during the Tampurān's hour long, drum-accompanied public procession after the ceremony, so that when the Tampurān arrived at the assembly hall each poet would read out what he had written. It was in effect a test of writing poetry at speed, and some famous poets, including Vaḷḷattōḷ, took part. Though I was not a poet, I was given a place among them. Vaḷḷattōḷ's poem was brilliant. Even my verse was well-received. The Tampurān made each of the poets a suitable gift, and a book was published, as planned, of the poems written that day.

After the opening of the Sanskrit college, the friendship between our teacher and Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmikaḷ (the Īṟava and religious leader) increased, and I went along with our teacher to one of the yearly meetings of a Sanskrit school established under the auspices of the Svāmikaḷ's Advaitāsramaṁ at Alwaye. There I had the good fortune of meeting another leading Īṟava, the famous poet and disciple of Shri Narāyāṇaguru, Kumāran Āśān, who was then better known as a worker for social uplift of the depressed classes.

I continued teaching at Paṭṭāmpi Sanskrit College for five years, considering myself a student rather than a teacher, after the ideal I have often heard our teacher express when he said: 'I am always a student.' I served him and travelled with him at every possible opportunity. He would get up at *brahmamuhūrtaṁ* (an auspicious time about three hours before sunrise), and start writing accounts and replying to letters, aided by his secretary Acyutattu Rāman Mūssatŭ. He insisted that U.P. Śaṅkuṇṇi Mēnōn and I should be there too. Having spent half the night in reading and discussion, we would arrive bleary-eyed and yawning before our teacher, to do most of the work of replying to letters. Noticing that we were finding the loss of morning sleep a little difficult, our teacher said to his secretary: 'Rāma, these chaps are up and coming young men. Just call them each on alternate days'. And subsequently that is how it was. Once the letter-writing work was over, we used this early morning period of time to learn

something from the teacher, which gave me the good fortune of going through the poem *Raghuvaṁsaṁ* with him, little by little, and of studying under him a sarggaṁ (canto) from Naiṣadhaṁ that includes a description of the dawn.

Sanskrit plays began to be acted at the college from 1913 onwards. The stage had not by then developed in Kerala as it has today, and all that was current were some musicals and a few translations of Sanskrit plays. In accordance with his emphasis on speaking Sanskrit, our teacher was keen on college performances of plays in the original Sanskrit. Many students were very poor at Sanskrit conversation, and the teachers – especially those who came from eastern districts – often could not use the language simply, without complicated technical usages and constructions from the *śāstraṁs* (the theoretical texts). Our teacher thought that the performance of Sanskrit dramas would help give students and teachers experience of the kind of Sanskrit more suitable for conversation. He used to say that the simple sentences in Sanskrit plays of Kalidasa's time and before were sufficient foundation to infer that long ago Sanskrit had been an everyday language of ordinary and practical affairs. But controversies did arise sometimes when we tried to use Sanskrit in everyday conversation, and of course the arbitrator to whom we referred these controversies was our teacher.

Another form of literary entertainment which we enjoyed very much was *akṣaraślōkaṁ*. Ten or fifteen of the more advanced students would gather with some teachers, and – sitting together on benches in front of our teacher – we would quote verses in turn. The rule was that each verse should begin with the same letter as the second half of the verse last quoted. The verses were supposed to be beautifully chanted, and a person who made more than two mistakes had to withdraw. What a delight it was to chant verses like this, in the presence of our teacher! He joined in the game too, quoting most often from *Naiṣadhaṁ*, which he knew entirely by heart. Likewise, U.P. usually quoted from *Uttara Rāma Caritaṁ* and I usually quoted from *Śākuntaḷaṁ*. The game provided a very useful source of intellectual stimulation for the students.

In the summer holidays of 1915, after the first batch of students had taken their final examinations (the *vidvalparīkṣa*) at Madras, our teacher went on a month's tour collecting funds to establish the college as a permanent institution. I was the only person to accompany him on this tour, and when we returned some sad news awaited us. It was the untimely death of one of our teacher's favourite students, his protege Shri Cōrratte Rāman Mūssatŭ, who had been studying at the college on a government scholarship. He had been intelligent and full of fun, and the sharpness of his wit had lightened our teacher's heavier moods. Our teacher had personally chosen him to act the part of Māḍhavyan in Kālidāsa's play *Śākuntaḷaṁ*. The sad news immersed our teacher in grief. Other than being touched by a moving passage of literature, or by seeing a play, I had never seen him shed a tear in worldly grief. So the tears that now came down his cheeks, at the news of his dear student's death, left us quite expressionless.

The four students who had been sent to Madras for the final examination passed well. Three of them had straightaway got positions as teachers in government high schools. And U.P. Śaṅkuṇṇi Mēnōn was for the moment appointed to teach at our own college.

K.V.M.'s subsequent career, after the age of twenty-eight

Translator's note: The salary of a teacher at Paṭṭāmpi Sanskrit College proved inadequate to meet his family expenses, and at the age of twenty-eight K.V.M. left the college to work again for the Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ publishing company at Trichur, now on a salary of thirty rupees a month, proof-reading and examining manuscripts. His subsequent career continued to be in publishing (books and periodicals) and teaching. He taught again at Paṭṭāmpi Sanskrit College, twice a week for a year, to help out his teacher who was short of a Malayalam instructor for the final class; he taught Malayalam for a couple of years in his late thirties at a higher elementary school in a country district; and he taught Sanskrit for several years in his fifties at Victoria Jubilee Girls' High School in Ernakulam.

He wrote and prepared many books for publication, in particular: traditional religious stories, some of which were used as school text-books; commentaries on religious and devotional works; a few books on traditional Indian medicine; and translations and expositions in Malayalam of Sanskrit classics and *Purāṇas*. Notably, he translated the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Agneyapurāṇa*. The translation of the *Arthaśāstra* was done as part of his work for the Bhāśa Pariṣkāraṇa (language development) committee, which he worked on for many years in the middle period of his life. The committee had been endowed by the abdicated Raja of Cochin; and its purpose was to prepare and publish Malayalam classics, Malayalam translations of Sanskrit classics, and unpublished early Malayalam literature recorded on palm leaf manuscripts in royal and private libraries.

The books that K.V.M. spent so much effort writing brought only a small additional income to the meagre salary of the teaching and publishing professions; and he continued to be under considerable financial pressure until soon after he retired, when at the age of sixty-six he was awarded a pension of a hundred rupees a month from the government of independent India, in recognition of his literary services. His literary activities continued after his retirement, until he passed away in 1965 at the age of seventy-seven. In particular he continued attending literary conferences and he wrote Malayalam and Sanskrit verse, much of it religious.

K.V.M.'s subsequent relationship with his teacher

Translator's note: K.V.M. maintained a close relationship with his teacher, Punnaśśēri Nampi, and a few passages from his autobiography are translated and adapted below to give some idea of how this teacher-disciple bond continued in later life. Even long after his teacher had passed away, when K.V.M. was in his middle sixties and was worrying about his financial future because he had just resigned his last job, he dreamt of his teacher; who comforted him and told him to act remembering 'Ātmaivahyātmano bandhurātmaivaripumātmanaḥ' (a Sanskrit quotation from the *Gītā* meaning that the self is its own friend and enemy), and then things would be alright.

The teacher's sixtieth birthday. Our teacher's *ṣaṣtipūrtti* (sixtieth birthday, an occasion for special celebration) was held in 1918. A committee and a few sub-committees were formed from among his students to organize suitable celebrations. There was a large-scale feeding of the poor funded by contribution from the students; we presented

out teacher with a *maṁgaḷapatraṁ* (a formal statement of gratitude and good wishes) at a special assembly held at the college; and our teacher's biography upto the age of sixty was written and published, and handed over to him with the maṁgaḷapatraṁ. I wrote the biography and Shri Vaṭakkeppāṭṭu Nārāyaṇan Nāyar prepared the maṁga-ḷapatraṁ in Sanskrit. The ceremonial gift of a cow to a Brahmin is usual at a sixtieth birthday celebration among caste Hindus, but we followed our teacher's feelings that a distribution of food was far more worthwhile.

At the special assembly held in the college, many speeches were made praising our teacher's achievements, and messages of congratulation and good wishes were read out from many famous men of learning and position. The students paid for a large portrait of our teacher to be put up in the college hall, but more than this painted portrait our teacher liked the pen portrait sketched in a stanza of Malayalam verse by the lively poet Shri Peṭṭarariyattu Valiya Rāmaneḷayatŭ. (Approximately translated, the stanza runs: 'He has learning, but no desire for the glamour of status; covering his fair, lean body are seen marks of sacred ash, a large-beaded *rudrākṣa* necklace and unbleached cloth; and students are with him all the time. May you adorn this great man with blessings, Lord!')

At father's last illness. In 1921 my father was suffering from his final illness; and, an experienced physician himself, he kept hidden from us what the illness was. Though I had studied some theory of medicine, I did not have much practical diagnostic ability; and finally I told my father that I wanted to bring in a doctor to examine and treat the illness, to which he hummed his assent. That same day I went to Punnaśśēri and asked my teacher, who was of course an experienced physician, if he would come to examine my father. When I suggested arranging a palanquin for the journey to my home the teacher replied: 'I don't need any of that. I know the way. I will come with Rāman at about six o'clock this evening.'

Since it was unusual to receive a man of the teacher's standing at home, my uncle was rather worried as to what special arrangements should be made to receive him. But knowing the teacher's character from long experience, I was able to put his mind at rest that nothing special would be required.

The teacher arrived at our house as he had said, and after his bath and evening prayers he went to see my father. He made an examination, determined that the disease was *mahōdaraṁ* (dropsy), and prescribed the usual medicines. I can still remember, as clearly as it happened, the scene when he left my father. Tears brimming from his eyes, my father took my hand and put it into the teacher's, saying in a voice shaking with emotion: 'I am his father only by virtue of his birth; in all else it is you who are really his father. I don't think I can say more.' The teacher comforted my father with the reply: 'I know that well. You can set your mind at rest as far as he is concerned.'

The last meeting. In 1935 I was working at Trichur, and when I came home with my family for the Ōṇaṁ festival I heard that the teacher was seriously ill. I had been periodically enquiring after his health and had been told that he had no particular illness, so this unexpected news caused me great alarm. Early next morning, I rushed to Punnaśśēri to see him. He told me that he was suffering from dysentery and that there was no other trouble besides bodily and mental weakness. He had no difficulty in speaking, but I noticed him give a little gasp now and then. His face radiated peace and purity of character, and he lay on his sickbed as though waiting for someone's

arrival, it seemed to me like the dying Bhīṣman on his bed of arrows waiting for Shri Krishna Bhagavān.[1]

The teacher talked with me for about half an hour. He asked about many things, my work on the language development committee, the Cochin Maharaja's visit to Trichur, the books I was writing, and so on. I tried hard to be as brief as possible and not to tire him by talking too much. Once he got talking, he would forget his state of health, and I was afraid this trait of his character might further weaken his body.

For some time it had been customary that students who came to see the teacher would ask his advice about their future activities and careers. I had also asked his advice once before, and he had told me then: 'The rule of royal families is coming to an end. It looks as though various political parties are going to rule in the future. Rather than joining any political party, stand firmly in "K.V.M. party". Take many other people into that party, if you can.' Now I asked his advice again, for I was afraid this might be my last opportunity. In reply he chanted a verse from *Aṣṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ*:

> naktaṁ dināni mē yānti
> kathaṁ bhūtasya samprati
> duḥkhabhaṅ na bhavatyēvaṁ
> sadā sannihitasmṛtiḥ

The verse means that one who acts considering always how future days and nights are going to pass, will never suffer grief. Hearing this advice, I fell at his feet and prostrated with devotion. Then I returned home. The next day I went back to Trichur. Whether sitting or walking or whatever I was doing, I was taken by a sense of numbness and despair. At four o'clock on the day after I returned to Trichur, the teacher passed away. I read the telegram telling me of it with a pounding heart and shaking hands.

When our teacher passed away, Kerala lost a great scholar. His chaste life had been a great cultural success; and through his students, he spread the traditional heritage in a lasting way. Financially, he had to face the loss of all his money through unfortunate investment at the end of his life, but he never complained nor said an ill word about those responsible for his loss. He passed away in good humour, in accordance with the saying: 'Man, born crying into the world, is fortunate to go out smiling.'

Koccuṇṇi Tampurān

> *Translator's note:* In the latter part of the autobiography, K.V.M. continues to give descriptions of interesting people whom he met. Translated below is K.V.M.'s description of a princely nobleman who specialized in the treatment of patients suffering from various kinds of poisoning. Snake-bites and scorpion-stings would, I presume, be among the kinds of poisoning treated, for certainly there was a reputed branch of medicine for treating such poisons, usually involving a certain amount of ritual and chanting of mantras.

Viṣavaidyan (literally 'poison-doctor') Koccuṇṇi Tampurān was a great man embodying the radiance of Kshatriya nobility. His lofty head had not once bowed before anybody. It would be difficult to find another Tampurān (nobleman) with such force

[1] This is a scene from the *Mahābhārata* epic.

of command. He did not hesitate to suffer any hardship or spend any quantity of money for treating patients affected by poison. If a poisoned person was brought to him, he could be called upon without regard for the time, even in the middle of the night. He would immediately come outside and arrange to treat the patient. Then, until the patient had returned to health, the patient, and those would accompanied him, could stay in the palace at the Tampurān's expense and under his care. On just hearing his peaceful, comforting voice, most of the poison would begin to subside. And it may well be said that the virtue in his treatment was unequalled. He had the greatest compassion for the poor, and in all matters his presence was a strong source of courage for the people of Trichur.

3. The Koṭuṅṅallūr Centre of Traditional Learning

A scholar who studied at this centre – his education and career[1]

Āṫṫūr Kṛṣṇa Piśāraṭi, known for short as Āṫṫūr, was born in 1876 at the place of Āṫṫūr near Koṭuṅṅallūr (Cranganore) to a poor family of Ampalavāsi caste (literally 'temple-servant' caste, intermediate between Nāyars and Brahmins). His father was a Nampūtiri Brahmin, but he belonged to his mother's family by matrilineal descent.

The following account of Āṫṫūr's life has been extracted from his biography to show: his traditional education through his own interest and initiative, despite considerable lack of money; his subsequent career after his education at Koṭuṅṅallūr; and his practical interest in the application of traditional theory, in music and in literary and educational fields.

Āṫṫūr's life-history

Āṫṫūr learned the elements of writing, reading and calculation at home, in the traditional manner of primary education. Then he stayed with maternal relatives at a place called Killikkuṙuśśimaṁgalaṁ, in order to study Sanskrit. Under Meleṭattu Rāmuṇṇi Nampiyār he studied Sanskrit verse and also *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ*, Sahasrayogaṁ (both texts of Ayurvedic medicine) and so on. During this period an old Nampūtiri Brahmin scholar happened to meet the boy, was impressed by his intellectual gifts, and personally taught him *Muktāvali* in tarkka śāstraṁ (theory of logic and debate) and introduced him to vyākaraṇa śāstraṁ (theory of grammar).

After these initial studies in Sanskrit, he had to spend a few years, starting at the age of fourteen, with his maternal uncle in estate management (looking after lands and plantations etc.). The uncle wanted to make his nephew a good manager, but the nephew wanted to study some more of the śāstraṁs (traditional intellectual disciplines). When he informed his uncle of this wish, the uncle replied: 'You need money for that, don't you?', thus making his opposition clear. This served to strengthen Āṫṫūr's wish; and finally, early one morning at the age of eighteen, without telling anyone and with only twenty-five rupees that he had earned during his period in management, he walked to Koṭuṅṅallūr where the family of Koṭuṅṅallūr Tampurāns (princes) provided instruction in further Sanskrit studies.

At Koṭuṅṅallūr, as he first intended, he studied nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic and debate), and acquired besides a general knowledge of several other śāstraṁs. He took a good part in verse-composition, acting and other artistic activities. His first two years at Koṭuṅṅallūr he lived very sparingly, managing the two years' living expenses on his twenty-five rupees, and making two meals a day of salt and tamarind and the portion of the midday offering of cooked rice that was available from the temple for three quarters of a rupee per month. Fortunately, in his last two years, a means was found of getting him his meals from the palace establishments of his teachers, the

[1] From Nārāyaṇa Piśāraṭi, 1966.

Koṭuṅṅallūr princes. He often used to say that these four years of his life were the foundation of all his successes.

At the age of twenty-two, he finished his studies and returned home. Then he spent some four years at various private homes teaching Sanskrit studies. At the first of these homes, a Nāyar household, where he stayed for a year, his Sanskrit student taught him some *vīṇa* playing in return. (A vīṇa is a classical, plucked-string instrument.) He married, at the age of twenty-five, a girl whose father was a vīṇa player and who played the vīṇa herself. After their marriage he and his wife studied the vīṇa together and both became quite accomplished musicians.

At the age of twenty-seven, he joined Ālattūr High School, where he taught for a year. At twenty-eight, he went to Trichur as editor for the Bhārata Vilāsaṁ Press; and at twenty-nine, he was also appointed Malayalam teacher at Trichur Government High School. He spent several years at Trichur, leading a very active professional life. His responsibilities included examining old works like *Kēraḷa Narmma Rāmāyaṇaṁ* and publishing them from Bhārata Vilāsaṁ Press, helping Shri Rāmavarmma Appan Taṁpuran run the *Maṁgaḷōdayaṁ* monthly, teaching Appan Tampurān tarkka śāstraṁ (theory of logic) and *Aśṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* (the Ayurvedic medical text), and attending to his work as Malayalam teacher at the Government High School.

In his early thirties, he went to teach at Trivandrum Maharaja's College, at the invitation of the famous Malayalam grammarian A.R. Rājarājavarmma Tampurān; and, after the latter's decease, Āṫṫūr was for many years in charge of the language department of the college. Then he spent more than five years as Sanskrit tutor to the Trivandrum crown prince; before retiring and returning to settle at Trichur in 1934, at the age of fifty-eight.

After his retirement, he continued to make considerable contributions in the field of Malayalam literature and in the śāstraṁs. To the end he remained absorbed in each of his activities: as a member of the Kerala Sāhitya (Kerala literary) academy, as chairman of the Kerala Kalā Pariṣattŭ (Kerala arts association), and as president of Trichur Sanskrit Pariṣattŭ (association). He chaired literary conventions and art festivals, and he broadcast speeches on the radio and wrote articles for periodicals. His mind remained active and alert.

During his period of retirement at Trichur his house was actually a *gurukulaṁ* (an ancient teaching institution that was an ideal of traditional education, where the students studied at the house of the teacher, maintaining a close family-type relationship with him). Āṫṫūr's attention was centred on three activities: the worship of God, teaching, and writing books. He would bathe and be engaged in worship till ten in the morning, and after lunch at eleven he would read the paper and rest a little. By two o'clock his pupils would be ready to study and there would be Sanskrit instruction until four in poetry and drama, alaṅkāraṁ (poetics), tarkkaṁ (logic) and Ayurveda (traditional medicine). In addition several male and female students studied the vīṇa, for both he and his wife considered teaching vīṇa-playing a great, heart-felt pleasure. He did his writing generally at night.

I[1] had the good fortune to become Āṫṫūr's student some time after he had retired and settled at Trichur. In 1937, I came to Pāvaṙaṭṭi Sanskrit college as a teacher. On Saturdays and Sundays I would stay with Āṫṫūr and study under him at his house in

[1] The first person here refers to biographer, K. P. Nārāyaṇa Piśāraṭi.

Trichur. The teacher-student bond started then has become stronger and stronger. I cite the following as an example of Āťťūr's affection for his students, as it applied to me. When I was a Sanskrit lecturer at Madhura American college, he got me a job in Kerala Varmma College, sent for me by telegram, put me up in his own house in Trichur for the first year, and then helped me find a place to stay with my family when my job became permanent. It is only plain truth to say that Gurupādar (traditional way of referring to an honoured teacher) has been for me a strong force of inner inspiration.

There were four main periods in Āťťūr's life: educational, professional, a period of retirement, and a period of sannyāsaṁ (renunciation). They might be compared to the traditional four stages of life (*āśramaṁs*): *brahmacaryaṁ* (the student's life), *gārhastyaṁ* (the householder's life), *vānaprasthaṁ* (the retired person's life, traditionally in the forest), and *sannyāsaṁ* (the renouncer's life). The first, educational period of Āťťūr's life lasted till the age of about twenty-four. His professional life started after this and lasted for another thirty-four years. After that, twenty-four years were spent in retirement. And finally, he led for seven years a sort of life of solitude suitable to a sannyāsi (renouncer). He passed away in 1964 at the age of eighty-eight.

Āťťūr's interests and contributions

As a teacher he was always ready to teach and explain, patient, careful, sympathetic, and very much respected and loved by his students. It was a matter of pride to say that one had been taught by Āťťūr.

He and his wife were accomplished musicians. Both played the vīṇa and gave lessons in vīṇa-playing, so much so that in later years their house was rarely without music students. They researched and experimented with the construction of vīṇas and with theoretical subjects like *śruti* (base-note), *svaraṁ* (note), *rāgaṁ* (melody). Āťťūr eventually wrote an original treatise on Indian music called *Saṁgīta Candrika*.

In the field of literature Āťťūr composed poems, though they are little known today. He wrote essays, textbooks and books for children; and made translations and adaptations in Malayalam from Sanskrit literature. His translation of Kālidāsa's play, *Śākuntaḷaṁ*, is a classic of Malayalam literature.

His main scholarly interest was in the śāstraṁs (the traditional theoretical systems) and their application. His major works in this field are *Saṁgīta Candrika*, the treatise on music that has just been mentioned, and *Bhāṣa Darppaṇaṁ*, a book on the theory of poetics (alaṅkāra śāstraṁ) in Malayalaṁ literature. In those days there was a lack of theoretical books for college-level students in Malayalam literature and grammar. A.R. Rājarājavarmma, Āťťūr's superior professor at Trivandrum Maharaja's College, had written some of the earliest, classic works in this field, and he influenced Āťťūr to turn his attention in this direction. The result was *Bhāṣa Darppaṇaṁ*. Both these theoretical works of Āťťūr's, *Bhāṣa Darppaṇaṁ* and *Saṁgīta Candrika*, were written in the style of a traditional text with a main text of condensed verses or aphorisms meant to be learned by heart, and then explanation and commentary of the theoretical principles compressed in the main text. In the treatise on music, *Saṁgīta Candrika*, the main text is in Sanskrit, and the explanation and commentary is in Malayalam.

The scholar's account of the centre and his education there[1]

In the biography from which the preceding account of Āṫṫūr's life was extracted, there is reproduced an article by Āṫṫūr himself, describing the famous Koṭuṅṅallūr centre of traditional learning. The article, translated below, contrasts the traditional intensive study of the classics with the more extensive methods of modern education, and it shows a tradition of teaching and scholarship in an aristocratic family interested in learning and its applications.

I would suggest that a central difference emerges here between a traditional centre of learning and a modern school or university. In the traditional centre, learning is organized through a curriculum of classics handed down in a tradition from teacher to pupil; so that the traditional student must look up far more to the individual teacher, to interpret and explain texts that were written long ago and are designed for intensive reflection. By contrast, the modern school or university organizes a curriculum of currently published text-books that are far more often updated than the old classics and are rather more inclined towards extensive, current information.

Some readers may find that the following account makes cumbersome reading, particularly where it reflects an unfamiliar system of learning or unfamiliar ways of expression. In the interests of authenticity, I have not deleted the unfamiliarities, but rather I have reproduced and explained them as best as I can. I feel that these unfamiliarities contribute significantly to the value of this record, because they show some of the contrasts and tensions which arise between traditional ways of laborious, intensive thinking and the modern emphasis on quick comprehensibility that has become familiar to us today.

The explanatory notes in parentheses are my addition.

Koṭuṅṅallūr gurukulaṁ

From Makaraṁ 1069 (January-February 1894) to Karkkatakaṁ 1074 (July-August 1898), for some four and half years, I stayed at Koṭuṅṅallūr (Cranganore) and studied chiefly *Muktāvali*, *Dinakaraṁ*, *Pancavādaṁ*, *Uttaravādaṁ*, *Vyulpattivādaṁ*, *Śaktivādaṁ* and other books in nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic). In between, as convenience permitted, I studied vyākaraṇaṁ (grammar), alaṅkāraṁ (poetics) and other śāstraṁs (theoretical systems or intellectual disciplines); and I engaged in the composition of verse, in which subject I earned some instruction.

At that time Koṭuṅṅallūr Puttan Kōvilakaṁ (the group of palaces at Koṭuṅṅallūr) was a veritable university of the highest excellence. There were as many as three hundred students studying many subjects in various classes at this gurukulaṁ (traditional centre of learning). From kāvyaṁs (poems) to the higher books of nyāyaṁ (logic), Vēdāntaṁ (a system of philosophy), alaṅkāraṁ (poetics), Ayurveda (a system of medicine), jyōtiṣaṁ (astrology), śilpaṁ (architecture), and the important arts of saṁgītaṁ (music) and abhinayaṁ (symbolic gesture, in acting and dancing) were taught there. Those prepared to give instruction to students were Vidvān Kuññirāmavarmma Tampurān, Cakraṁ Tampurān, Valiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān, Kuññan Taṁpuran, Kavisārvvabhauman Ceṙiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān, Mahāmahōpāddhyāya Bhaṭṭaśrī

[1] From Nārāyaṇa Piśāraṭi, 1966.

Gōdavarmma Tampurān, Ceṙiya Kuññuṇṇi Tampurān also called Bhāgavatar Tampurān, and Marumakan Tampurān. Lessons were held in the Tampurāns' (princes') residences, called 'Old bungalow', 'New bungalow', 'East bungalow' and so on.

The manner of teaching in those days was not as it is in schools and colleges today: teaching the students of each class many subjects without looking to the relation of a subject with what comes before and after, without looking to the relative difficulty of understanding subjects, nor to each student's individual aptitude, but teaching in a way that leaves no other alternative than to experience the meaning of the old saying, 'Parappukṛṣiyerappŭ' ('Farming wide is begging'). Nor was it like studying for an M.A. or other examination, taking two or three coins' weight of passages from the Vedas, two grains of verses from the *Gṛhya Sūtraṁs* (a treatise on the performance of household rituals), one measure *Niruktaṁ* (an exposition of the Vedas), one and a half measures, alaṅkāra śāstraṁ (theory of poetics), three-quarters of a measure nyāyaṁ (logic), one and a quarter measures each of vyākaraṇaṁ (grammar), nāṭakaṁ (drama) and kāvyaṁ (verse); and taking in all these in an indigestible way without powdering them or making a decoction, but with the attitude 'It's all to be consumed' thus leading the way to know-all pride.

In those days, the members of a class were taught just one book. Only after its content had been grasped would a more advanced book be studied. Those who were studying *Raghuvaṁśaṁ* would study two or three chapters and understand its style, and only after that would they be ready to study *Māghaṁ* or *Kirātārjjunīyaṁ*. In the śāstraṁs (theoretical systems or intellectual disciplines), the curriculum was arranged to start with some suitable small books and proceed in accordance with due process of growth in power of intellectual understanding and clear knowledge of the subject matter.

The teachers of those days understood the principle that if sound competence and erudition were achieved in anyone śāstraṁ (intellectual discipline), any other śāstraṁ could be mastered on one's own. Therefore it was their practice to make their pupils rich in knowledge by teaching them one particular subject, step by step, systematically upto the advanced books. They also knew how many hours a day a person could properly apply his mind to understand a given subject. Therefore in those days teachers did not tire out students by thrusting in all sorts of ideas and dreams here and there for a period of four or five hours, in a way that makes it impossible to maintain concentration.

For each class, the lesson lasted for only one or one and a half hours in the day. For the rest of the time, the lesson that had been studied was to be thought over and mastered. In particular the students of a class would get together; and while one of them gave a discourse in the way the teacher had taught, the others would correct the mistakes that arose. Only those who have had the experience of trying out this method can really know how excellent is the sureness of knowledge that it produces.

When the students went to class next, the teachers did not need to ask whether the previous lessons had been thought over. They would know well enough in the course of teaching the day's lesson whether each student had or had not thought over the previous lessons. But they would not say even one word about the matter.

Once lessons in the śāstraṁs (intellectual disciplines) started, students were put into successively higher classes and taught each śāstraṁ according to individual aptitude. If a student studying in one class was seen to have the intelligence and worth for the next class above no objection was raised to his studying in both the classes concur-

rently. But no student was allowed to take regularly taught instruction in two śāstraṁs at the same time. The teachers were decided that whichever śāstraṁ was being studied, a student's full intellectual capacity should be systematically used in that śāstraṁ alone. Only then would he achieve the required competence and be able, as previously described, to master other śāstraṁs through his own efforts. They knew that if one attended to two śāstraṁs at the same time, it would be difficult to achieve the required competence even in one. As to the students being taught each śāstraṁ in accordance with variation of aptitude, I shall give an example from my own experience.

We started learning an advanced book of nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic), *Pañcavādaṁ*, section by section. There were sixteen of us when we started learning it. Before the book was half over there were only six of us left, Marumakan Tampurān, Māntiṭṭa Kuñcu Nampūtiri, Cerukunnaṁ Nīlakaṇṭhan Nampūtiri, Rāmasvāmi Śāstrikaḷ, Ōli Śaṅkaran and myself. The others withdrew and started studying other subjects. It was not because our teacher had advised them to do so. All the teachers there knew that once the students realized they were not understanding something properly, they would try something else. The students had not come to study in order to get through a course.

Let me say a word more here about thinking over previous lessons. Our determination was that immediately after studying the current day's lesson, we would every day think over ten previous lessons from the lesson of the day before. Until that was over, we would not go to sleep at night. Often, because of the arguments and subsequent reconciliations that this produced it would be like observing Śiva Rātri (a festival night on which the participants do not sleep) itself. In that case, we would decide to get up at two o'clock in the morning and start our thinking over again. Otherwise the day before and the day after would become one day!

The Tampurāns (princes) taught between one and five o'clock in the afternoon. However, at Valiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān's residence, called 'East bungalow', lessons in kāvyaṁ (poetry) and instruction in *Pāṇinīya Sūtraṁs* (a classic treatise in grammar) started from eight o'clock and lasted till ten o'clock in the morning, under the Tampurān's supervision. Most often it was his chief students, Kūnēṟattu Paramu Mēnōn, Appukkuṭṭa Jyōlsyar and others, who were made to conduct the lessons in kāvyaṁ (poetry). These chief pupils would be in the Tampurān's presence most of the time, making many kinds of calculations in astrological subjects like jātakaṁ (horoscope-casting) and praśṇaṁ (problem-answering) as well as in architectural subjects like temple and house construction. This attracted the greatest number of students. The Tampurān had come to teach books included in the four śāstraṁs of jyōtiṣaṁ (astrology), taccu śāstraṁ (architecture), Ayurveda (medicine) and vyākaraṇaṁ (grammar).

The teacher-Tampurāns all conducted lessons in two or three stages, whichever was found suitable. Valiya Kuññirāmavarmma Tampurān taught chiefly the advanced grammatical texts, *Manōrama* and *Śēkharaṁ*. Because of the sequential difference of parts in each book, lessons had ended up in two stages. In other words, books in which familiarity with the former portions was necessary for knowledge of the latter portions were all likely to be spread over two classes. Valiya Kuññuṇṇi Tampurān also taught *Manōrama* and *Śēkharaṁ* chiefly, to some other students. Kuññan Tampurān taught the appropriate books in nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic) upto *Dinakaraṁ*, and *Siddhānta Kaumudi* and *Manōrama* in vyākaraṇaṁ (grammar). He had many students, in four or five classes. It was under Gurupādar (traditional term of respect for a teacher) that I studied *Muktāvali* and *Dinakaraṁ*.

Ceŕiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān taught primarily *Alaṅkāra Sarvasvaṁ*, *Rasagaṁgādharaṁ* and other major books in sāhitya śāstraṁ (theory of literature) and Ayurveda (medicine). He considered carrying on arguments on literary subjects to be like a great festival. He would carefully give advice to those with an aptitude for poetry. Besides, he was a great expert in the art of abhinayaṁ (mime – symbolic gesture in acting and dancing). He had mastered the organs of eye, cheek, forehead etc. in order to mime the rasaṁs (flavours) and bhāvaṁs (moods) according to nāṭya śāstraṁ (theory of dramatic art, acting and dance). Even the famous kathakaḷi dancer Kēśava Kuŕuppŭ came to the palace on several occasions to see the Tampurān's abhinayaṁ (mime) and to take his advice, thus understanding – among other things – the required positions and particularities that have to be brought about in the organs of the body in the abhinayaṁ (miming) of each rasaṁ (emotional flavour).

From time to time the Tampurān would select the more gifted students and supervise the acting of a play. Sometimes he himself would take a part. Both Sanskrit and Malayalam plays were acted. One incident lies throbbing in my heart, to this day. It happened when the fifth act of the play *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* was being performed. The Tampurān himself took the role of Rāvaṇan. At the part 'Varṣavara cirannivvāsitasya-sūryasyalaṅkāyaṁ kaḥ prasaṁgaḥ', when I – who was acting Varṣavaran's part – heard the cry 'Varṣavara!', I quite literally got frightened, shuddered and began to tremble. For that reason, Rāvaṇan had to call Varṣavaran once again, mellowing his tone. When the play was over, I had to bear a little leg pulling.

If a play was being acted in Malayalam, the determination was that each character would make up his own part, and adjust with the other characters the portions that were acted together.

Ācāryapādar Bhaṭṭaśrī Gōdavarmma Tampurān taught *Brahmānandīyaṁ* in vēdānta śāstraṁ (theory of Vēdānta, a system of philosophy) and the *Gadādharīyaṁ* books in nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic). At the time he was teaching us, he was engaged in the composition of a commentary on *Prāmāṇyavādaṁ*, and he also composed the verse-treatise on *Vyulpattivādaṁ* (a text in the theory of logic) called *Siddhānta Māla*. It was hard to see him other than in the state of looking at a higher text of some śāstraṁ (theoretical system). Though he was a profound scholar in vyākaraṇaṁ (grammar) as well, the instruction he gave was in Vēdāntaṁ (a system of philosophy) and nyāyaṁ (logic). And I remember the controversy that he conducted, through written articles, with the great scholar Vātānāṅkuŕuśśi Piccu Śāstrikaḷ on some topics in *Śabdēndu Śēkharaṁ*. He was indeed a sarvatantrasvatantran (a person with free mastery in all fields of knowledge).

Kuññuṇṇi Tampurān was Ceŕiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān's student in the art of abhinayaṁ (dramatic expression through gesture). He had an unusual gift for poetry, but his chief training had been in the subject of abhinayaṁ. In this subject he had many students. The fine kathakaḷi dancer Pattikkāntoṭi Rāvuṇṇi Mēnōn and others studied under him methods of abhinayaṁ (miming) of the rasaṁs (emotional flavours).

Marumakan Tampurān taught the books, *Dinakaraṁ* and *Gadādharīyaṁ*, in nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic). He taught me *Sāmānya Nirukti* in *Pañcavādaṁ*. It is hard to find anyone like him openly demonstrating such fondness for his pupils in word and action without falsely praising them.

Though Cakraṁ Tampurān was erudite in sāhityaṁ (literature) and vyākaraṇaṁ (grammar), he was primarily engaged in instructing in the art of saṁgītaṁ (music). He used to train many people in several classes in vocal and instrumental music. He

had mastered three musical instruments, the vīṇa, the svaravittŭ and the fiddle. He had many students in each of these. Among his chief students were Koṭuṅṅallūr Nīlakaṇthan Nampiyār, learning the vīṇa, and Ceṙiya Kuññuṇṇi Tampurān's wife Lakṣmikkuṭṭi Nētyāramma, learning vocal music.

Besides all these, there were at that time students learning to read the *Purāṇaṁs* (reading aloud with a chanted tune, for which there were special rāgaṁs or melodies) from Peyyutti Tampurān and Aviññikkāṭṭu Tampurān at this gurukulaṁ (traditional centre of learning, referring here to the Koṭuṅṅallūr centre). Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān was not staying permanently at Koṭuṅṅallūr at this time. Occasionally, he would come and stay for a month or two and then start touring again. While he was there, his chief amusement was to make many persons compose poems, and to test the students by setting them verses. Although the craze for chess was widespread, only a very few people engaged in it at Koṭuṅṅallūr, perhaps because of the opportunity of better amusements there.

The manner of imparting humility among the ranks of students at this (i.e. Koṭuṅṅallūr) gurukulaṁ (traditional centre of learning) was something quite special. If one went and sat in class at the time appointed for teaching, one would be taught and then sent away. Beyond that the teacher-Tampurāns did not enquire what each student's behaviour was like. They had no further eye on whether anyone of their students was bathing or eating or upto some mischief. The teachers, who were generally men of peace were well assured that no one would dare show outright mischief in those surroundings.

There was in effect a first class means of dealing with such faults as bad temper, displeasure, untidiness and so on. Without knowing where or how it started, everyone would somehow acquire a nick-name. Aṇṭikkaṇṇan (nut-eyes), Sugrīvan (the monkey chieftain in the *Rāmāyaṇa*), Kunnalakkaṁ, Tuṇḍīraṁ, Maṅkiṇṭivālan (spout-tail), would be the kind of names. Such a nick-name would then stick, and a person's original name would be forgotten.

At that time there were students from many places, from Trivandrum to Nīlēśvaraṁ. The rule was to add the prefix 'Ōḷi' to the nicknames of those who came from north of Calicut and the prefix 'Aṇṇan' to the nick-names of those who came from Cērttala southwards. Thus they would be known by such names as Ōḷimūṣikan ('mūṣikan' means 'rat'), Aṇṇanaṇṭi, and so on. The name that was given to me was Tuṇṭīran. I came to know of this nick-name when one day Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān looked at my. face and said 'Hey Tuṇṭīrā! My elder brother Koccuṇṇi is calling you'. If one showed displeasure, then everyone would find it very enjoyable. Pure souls had to decide whether to continue their studies and endure such teasing, or whether to make an end of their studies and go away. If a young man walked with a bit of a swagger, that was enough, the next day he would become the incarnation of Kāma dēvan (the Hindu god of love, equivalent of Cupid), and on that basis all sorts of poems would begin to come forth.

It was in this way that the teachers taught their students the gift of humility, and tested each student whether he had come to study with a thirst for knowledge or whether he had come merely for the status of saying that he was studying at Koṭuṅṅallūr. Actually, once the teachers got to know that a student had come to learn, no matter what trouble he had to put up with, then their affection for him would become like that of a father and a mother. This was my experience.

I shall say only a word or two more, about the tradition of teachers. Koṭuṅṅallūr Vidvān Eḷaya Tampurān had been a contemporary of the great scholar and poet, Maharaja of Travancore, Svāti Tirunāḷ. His (the Tampurān's) student was a great scholar, famous by the name of Kumbhakoṇaṁ Kṛṣṇa Śāstrikaḷ[1], who was very learned in vyākaraṇa śāstraṁ (theory of grammar) and who had made Koṭuṅṅallūr his settled residence. He was as much as ninety years old at the time when I was studying at Koṭuṅṅallūr gurukulaṁ. Even then he remembered *Siddhānta Kaumudi* by heart. It was under this great scholar that our teachers, Valiya Kuññirāmavarmma Tampurān, Cakraṁ Tampurān, Valiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān, and Kuññan Tampurān had rigorously studied vyākaraṇa śāstraṁ (theory of grammar). Ceŕiya Koccuṇṇi Tampurān and others were these Tampurāns' students.

In jyōtiṣaṁ (astrology) and śilpa śāstraṁ (theory of architecture), they had joined the tradition of students from the famous Jyōtiṣi Valiya Tampurān. In music, they had the position of students descended from Vidvān Eḷaya Tampurān's maternal uncle, famous under the name of 'Vīṇakkāran Valiya Tampurān'. In nyāya śāstraṁ (theory of logic), our respected teacher Bhaṭṭaśrī Gōdavarmma Tampurān was a student first of Kocci Valiya Tampurān, who abdicated the ruling throne (of Cochin), and later of Shri Śaṭhakōpācāryar.[2] Even at the time we were studying, Shri Śaṭhakōpācāryar would occasionally come to stay at Koṭuṅṅallūr and give us encouragement in studies of the śāstraṁs (intellectual disciplines). And his youngest son Anantācāryar was our classmate.

A thus fortunate era has disappeared from Kerala, never to return here again!

A literary celebrity from the family that formed this centre of learning[3]

Koṭuṅṅallūr Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān, born in 1864, was a member of the family of Tampurāns (princes) who formed the famous Koṭuṅṅallūr (Cranganore) centre of traditional learning. He has already been mentioned in the extract of K.V.M.'s autobiography and in the translation of Āťťūr's article about the Koṭuṅṅallūr centre of learning. The following extract from his daughter's article about him is intended to show an instance of the devotional and religious context of traditional learning and literary activity.

The picture which emerges of Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān, from his birth centenary memorial volume, is that he was a progressive and liberal-minded man of his times who led a simple life unspoiled by his literary fame and success. He was a brilliant versifier who would spontaneously compose and recite verse as the occasion demanded, as for example when moved by the picture of a goddess. He is also said to have enjoyed writing letters and making speeches in verse. His metre for metre translation of the *Mahābhārata*, referred to in the

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[1] 'Śāstrikaḷ' is a plural, honorific form of 'Śāstri', used commonly in Kerala for Brahmin scholars of Tamil origin.

[2] The suffix 'ācāryar' indicates that Shri Śaṭhakōpācāryar and his son were Brahmins.

[3] From *Eńe Acchan* ('My Father'), an article about Koṭuṅṅallūr Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān, by his daughter Kōyippiḷḷil Sarasvatiyamma (published in Kuññukuṭṭan Tampurān's birth centenary memorial volume, Kerala, 1964).

following account, is said to have been composed and dictated at the rate of a hundred ślōkaṁs (stanzas) an hour, completing the translation of the entire *Mahābhārata* in some three years. This translation of the *Mahābhārata* is remembered mainly as a brilliant virtuoso feat more than as profound literature. The classic, revered version of the *Mahābhārata* in Malayalam is the sixteenth century retelling by Eṟuttacchan.

My father

I can still remember father arriving at our house in the evenings during my childhood. Seeing father at the gate, we children would take hold of both his hands and pull him along with us. Once he came into the house we would shout, 'A name! A name!', at our poet father. It was for him to write us a prayer for our evening worship that we would plead like this. At once, father would ask who we wanted it to be about. We would then say the name of the god or goddess that came to mind. He would sit cross-legged on the ground in front of the standing oil lamp, leaning forward on his left hand; and, taking the pencil we brought him in his right hand, he would start writing with a scratching noise on a slip of paper. All the while we children would be playing, laughing, making a noise, and sometimes climbing over him and pulling his hair. Whatever we did, he neither became annoyed nor scolded us. At the most he would occasionally smile. After ten or fifteen minutes of this, he would hand us the devotional song he had written. *Vaykkattappan pāna* was written like this for us.

There is a legend that in ancient times the Koṭuṅṅallūr Tampurāns (princes) were able to see the goddess in her manifest form. Our elders made us people of Koṭuṅṅallūr believe that Koṭuṅṅallūr Valiya Koyi Tampurān was the goddess's representative. It was said that the Koṭuṅṅallūr Goddess was manifested in different forms during different periods of the day. She was conceived as Sarasvati Dēvi (the goddess of learning and culture) at dawn; as Durga, the goddess of prosperity, in the morning; and as Jyesṭha Bhagavati (the goddess of misfortune) at midday.

Father, who believed in the dictum 'Vidyāsmat paradēvata' ('Knowledge is my supreme divinity') and who had a desire for Sarasvati Dēvi's blessings, usually went to the temple at dawn. After the early morning cannon shot, he would bathe and visit the temple, to have sight of the goddess (to pay his respects and view the idol) by the coming of dawn.

Kavisārvvabhauman Koccuṇṇi Tampurān, who was one of father's family elders and who had finished writing the *Bhāgavataṁ*, tried to translate the *Mahābhārata*. After three months, he managed to translate only a hundred ślōkaṁs (stanzas). About this time, father thought to himself that he must translate the *Mahābhārata*, metre for metre, and he said so to his family elders. They all showered him with blessings and good wishes. Koccuṇṇi Tampurān said: 'Child, it is a very difficult matter. Just think carefully. I am labouring under the difficulty of having started and being unable to complete it. It may be best not to start.' What Koccuṇṇi Tampurān said was true, but father had firmly set himself on the translation. He took his elders' words to heart and made some inner resolutions. He was sure that there was nothing which could not be accomplished with the blessings of the goddess.

From that day he started a period of intense worship (bhajanaṁ) to the Koṭuṅṅallūr Goddess; and he made up his mind that on the day when he ended this period of worship (bhajanaṁ), he would start the translation sitting at the temple door. He made

a firm vow to carry on the period of worship until he felt that the goddess was pleased, and he slept at night in the priest's residence. One night, at three o'clock in the morning, a divine form suddenly appeared before father, saying: 'Child, don't be afraid. You may start to think of me myself in your mind'. Then the form slowly walked to the western gate of the temple and disappeared inside. Seeing this divine radiance father immediately called the Nampūtiri priest and tried to show it to him. 'There! It's going! Look! Look quick!' But, unfortunately, the priest could not see it.

The very next day, father placed three hundred rupees on the temple door and, ordering an offering of tṛmadhuraṁ[1] every day until the translation was finished, he took up the book and started the translation. Like father, I also believe that it was thus, through the blessing of the Koṭuṅṅallūr Goddess, that he achieved the translation of the Indian people's fifth Veda.

[1] 'tṛmadhuraṁ': literally, 'three sweets'.

4. Traditional Medicine

An Indian administrator's account[1]

Different schools of medicine. There are three schools of medicines prevalent in Travancore, viz. *Ashtangahridayam*,[2] *Chintamani* and *Yunani*. The first is the most favoured and popular one and obtains throughout North Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, while the second is confined to Trivandrum and South Travancore besides the Tamil districts of the Madras Presidency; and the third, the Yunani or Grecian school, is very rare in Travancore. Mercury, Arsenic and Sulphur form the indispensable ingredients in most of the prescriptions of the *Chintamani* and *Yunani* systems which sometimes in the hands of unskilled Vaidyans [doctors] seriously endanger the health and even the life of the patients; even otherwise, these medicines are known to have caused ulceration of the mouth, inflammation of the whole alimentary system, burning sensation all over tie body and sometimes even death. But as regards the *Ashtangahridayam* system of treatment there can be no danger at all. Its pharmacopoeia consists of drugs which are none other than leaves, roots and corms that are easily assimilable into our system by virtue of their akinness in property to the roots, vegetables and grains upon which we subsist. Very obstinate cases of rheumatism, gonorrhoea and other allied chronic complaints are being easily cured by means of medicated oils, ointments, decoctions, liniments and ghees[3] of the *Ashtangahridayam* pharmacopoeia; and these can be used by the healthy as well as by those suffering from diseases. The medicines prescribed by the *Ashtangahridayam* system are specially fitted for the people of this country who take only light food and gentle exercise.

The circumstance that India is a vast and fertile country blessed with the advantages of regular and periodical seasons, has made it the 'Encyclopaedia of the vegetable world'. Our ancient authorities on medicine have taken considerable pains to study the properties of the herbs that came under their observation and have classified them into Ganas or groups based on their properties and each successive writer has added to the list of the useful plants and herbs of India. Caraka gives fifty groups of ten herbs each which, according to him, 'are enough for the purposes of an ordinary physician,' though he holds at the same time that 'the number of groups can be increased to any extent.' Susruta gives a list of 760 herbs in thirty-seven sets or groups arranged according to their common properties, and Vagbhata, the author of *Ashtangahridayam* follows the method of Susruta in the fifteenth chapter of his work, 'but the concise way of his description has a charm of its own'. Even the particular seasons are prescribed for gathering the medicinal herbs, the period of their growth, when they

[1] Quoted from Nagam Aiya, 1906, Volume II, pages 551-6, 558 and 568-9.

[2] Ashtangahridayaṁ (*Aṣ́ṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ*) is the classic Ayurvedic medical text prevalently used in Kerala. The classic texts of *Caraka* and *Suśruta* are more prevalently used by Ayurvedic doctors in north India. *Aṣ́ṭāṁgahṛdayaṁ* is a later text than *Caraka* and *Suśruta*, and apparently makes use of content from both earlier texts.

[3] 'ghee' means clarified butter.

possess their distinctive properties, the particular localities from which alone they should be collected and the manner of treating them, extracting their active principles and preserving them – all these are described with such minute detail and care they are a marvel to the modern enquirer. The treatises recommend that the physicians themselves should go to the jungles and with the help of those acquainted with the forests, gather the herbs when they are in flower, taking care to avoid those injured by insects or growing on bad soils, and the physician should himself be able to identify the various herbs that he has to deal with – a state of things impossible to conceive of in this age of division of labour in highly civilized communities like those of Europe and America, though many Native Vaidyans[1] come up to this standard to a great extent in their extremely limited spheres of usefulness. For the Native Vaidyan knows the plants and herbs himself, knows where they are to be had, collects them, makes the medicine himself either in his own house or in that of his patient. He attends upon the patient or the patient's father or uncle for days and weeks together, discussing with him the nature of the disease and the virtues of his pharmacopoeia, the progress from day to day and the further medicines or treatment that may be required, and ceases his visits only after the patient has bathed which is the test of recovery, after which the patient himself visits the Vaidyan in his house, complaining to him of the balance of ills that still trouble him and taking the necessary prescription for further treatment. All this time, the Vaidyan has not, it must be remembered, been paid anything for his trouble and attendance. The patient has only had to pay for the herbs and the drugs and the labour of bringing them and preparing them. When the time comes to pay, which may be several weeks or months after the patient's complete recovery, the remuneration will be paid in the form most convenient to the patient and entirely according to his own means. It may be a pair of cloths or a bunch of plantains or a bundle of tobacco leaves or some quantity of rice and condiments. This is offered with many words of thankfulness and gratitude to the Vaidyan who accepts them with good grace, saying 'I am very much pleased. Don't say anything of my treatment. I am glad you have recovered under God's help. I was very anxious about your case and so on.' And, it must be added, that all through life the patient continues to be grateful to the village Vaidyan repeating such small presents as those enumerated above on all occasions of weal and woe in the Vaidyan's house, as tokens of his regard and gratitude.…

But the *Ashtangahridayam* treatment is not as widely known among western scholars, as for instance the *Chintamani* and other works, perhaps because the language viz. Sanskrit in which it is written, does not afford so much facility for translation as the Dravidian languages. Though the western scholars have adopted many of the medicines and prescriptions of the *Chintamani* into their own system, they have yet to study the numberless herbs, referred to in the *Ashtangahridayam* science, which abound in the Indian jungles. *Ashtangahridayam* is already losing favour even with the inhabitants of southern India partly on account of the general indifference to our

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[1] 'Vaidyan' is the traditional word for a doctor, and 'native vaidyan' is here used to imply a local doctor of indigenous medicine, as opposed to a doctor trained in western clinical medicine, which was much more a foreign system of medicine then than it is today, given the western medical hospitals and clinics that are now established and run by Malayali doctors and nurses all over Kerala.

ancient sciences and partly also on account of the want of sufficient inducement and encouragement to the native practitioners at the hands of the influential and enlightened public who have begun to largely patronise European medicine. But the belief of the majority of the people, especially in the rural parts, in the efficacy of the mode of treatment under the *Ashtangahridayam* system, still remains unshaken. The bulk of the Nambudiri[1] Brahmins as well as Sudras and a good many of the middle classes of Travancore still take kindly to the *Ashtangahridayam* treatment only.

Some of the Nambudiri doctors trace their knowledge of medicine to Parasurama's instruction, their ancestors having received the secrets of the science directly from him. Such are the Ashtavaidyans of Malabar belonging to the eight families of the Nambudiris who were deputed by Parasurama to devote themselves to the study of medicine and the curing of diseases. One such family is that of the Vayakkara Musu at Kottayam, a family of eminent physicians on this coast. A brief account of the late head of the family, a distinguished ornament to the school of *Ashtangahridayam* medicine, may be of interest to the general reader.

Vayakkara Musu. His name was Aryanarayanan Musu but he was better known throughout Travancore and Malabar by the name of his Illam as Vayakkara Musu. He was born in the year 1842 and died four years ago at the age of sixty. He was a great master of the healing art of the *Ashtangahridayam* school. But the public confidence in him far surpassed his achievements and was nothing short of apocryphal. The people called him 'Dhanvantari' or the incarnation of Vishnu in medicine. The man himself was a marvel to look at. He was calm, unassuming, cool and collected; and visitors from all parts of Malabar thronged to his house in the morning hours of all the days of the year. He was visible for about 4 hours daily (6 AM to 10 AM) and he listened to what every patient had to say, quietly and attentively. No word was lost on him for he was all attention. He was a most thoughtful man and had a wonderful memory. One visitor after another narrated his story to his heart's content and the only interruption which was offered to the web of narrative from each visitor was the questionings by the Musu. When he had finished listening to the whole lot of the visitors of the day, he looked at his pupils or disciples who attended on him by turns and pointing out to each patient, he quoted the text which was to be prescribed in the particular case. He gave only the initial words of the text. The pupils immediately wrote out the full text of the prescription with details of medicine, manner of preparation, period of treatment and doses, for they are all experts in the art, well trained for years under the eminent Musu. The written cadjan chits[2] of prescription were placed before the Musu and he would hand them over himself one by one to the patients concerned, for, it should be remembered that no patient would take the chit except from the Musu's hands. He had they said a special power for curing diseases. So it was widely believed and the patient would ask 'Please sir, deliver the ola chit[3] yourself into my hands.' To others whose complaints were of a trifling nature he would prescribe by word of mouth what should be done for the patient. His treatment was often of a most simple nature. One of my informants, a graduate of ability and knowl-

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[1] 'Nambudiri' is another way of transliterating 'Nampūtiri'.

[2] The prescriptions were written on palm leaf.

[3] i.e., the prescription written on palm leaf.

edge, gave me an interesting account of his visit to the Musu. My informant was a man of consequence and the Musu received him with courtesy which consisted in beckoning him to a seat on the floor near him. It may be stated that the Musu and his visitors would all sit on the floor of an open front verandah of the Illam, while those who would not sit with him would stand in the yard or if they were of an inferior caste, outside the enclosure, but all were before him and in view and he would talk to all who had come. I have myself seen the Musu's house twice, once when he was alive some thirty years ago and then after he had died. It is necessary also to add that the Musu's conversation was nothing more than one or two words of question about the ailments of his visitors. Otherwise there was no talk for he would be chewing all the while and all the visitors were hospitably treated to the chew in his house with the utmost liberality and generosity. This is a large item of expenditure to the Musu for the chew everyday means bundles of tobacco. My informant went to consult him on a small ailment to himself and the members of his family. After giving his case in a few words he waited so long that he got disgusted and wished to have left the Musu but unwilling to be considered rude he bore the ennui of waiting without the Musu speaking one word or taking any notice of him which however was not any studied indifference or discourtesy to my informant for all the other visitors were treated in a like manner. The Musu was all the while thinking of the various ailments reported to him that morning and how to prescribe for them. So when my informant made a sign to start, he said 'Yes your case, please buy four cash (about 2 pies) worth of such a bark and boil it with your bathing water and pour it over you when you wash daily. You will be alright in a week.' My informant who was already disgusted with his being kept waiting so long and with such apparent indifference was positively put out when this prescription was given to him. He thought the Musu was not earnest in prescribing in this fashion. However, without a word of murmur but extremely provoked, he left the Musu regretting that he ever went to him at all, but to his wonder he told me that he found the Musu's preparation a most marvellous remedy, for he and all his people were cured in three or four days after he began washing himself with the water boiled with the bark prescribed by the Musu. I have heard numerous other stories of the Musu's mannerisms and his marvellous feats of cures of all sorts of diseases. I met him first thirty-four years ago, when he celebrated the milk-warming ceremony of his Illam in Kottayam and then again a few months before he died. He was always the same quiet and thoughtful man that he had been, deeply versed in his art and centre of attraction and usefulness to the whole of Malabar who now mourn his loss. He has left a son of about fifteen years of age said to be a brilliant gifted lad worthy to take his place. The old Musu regretted that he could not give the boy some practical training under him. All castes and classes of people alike adored him as the medical sage and savant.

A musician attached to his Highness the Maharajah's place at Trivandrum was suffering from an attack of malignant cancer on his cheek. For a long time he was under European medical treatment in Trivandrum, then under the special directions of his doctors he went to Madras to undergo an operation in the General Hospital there. All that medical or surgical aid could do was done but he got only temporary relief, and a short time after, the malady appeared again with unabated vehemence. At last with little hope of recovery the poor sufferer resorted to Vayakkara Musu who cured him completely within a space of thirty days by means of a medicated oil for external application to the cheek. Several extreme cases of malaria, dropsy, paralysis and

gravel have been cured by him within a miraculously short period with very simple drugs. He had won honours at the hands of the sovereigns of Travancore and Cochin and of the princes and nobles of Malabar by his successful treatment of several complicated diseases. Several of his disciples practise medicine in all parts of Travancore but none of them have yet come up to his standard of excellence. He worked to the last day of his life. In the forenoon of that day, as he was giving medical advice to one of his patients the Musu told him: 'It looks as if I myself want a doctor; I will go in.' So saying he dismissed his patient, went in, where he had arranged for a durba grass-bed on the floor and for a lighted lamp, said his last prayer, laid himself on the grass-bed and quietly quitted this life – which evidently he had anticipated and arranged for. This dramatic end made a deep impression on the whole population of Malabar.…

Hindu diet. The most characteristic feature of native medicine, in fact of Hindu life in general is its diet. The native Vaidyan never prescribes a course of treatment without prescribing a diet at first, let it be never so simple; for in his view half the cure consists in bringing down the strength of the patient to the minimum stage of vitality. He is afraid he cannot grapple with a disease unless the patient's superfluous energy is arrested by a weak diet. An English doctor cannot imagine how a patient can subsist on such a low diet. What is a low diet in the estimate of an English doctor will frighten a native Vaidyan on account of its unnecessary strength. He will have nothing to do with a patient who does not implicitly carry out his orders in regard to diet and various devices are adopted to weaken the normal Hindu diet which is weakness itself as compared with the diet of European nations. A word here about the Hindu diet in general, which regulates the lives of millions of the Indian population, may be justifiable.

…An abstainer from animal food will even go to the length of believing that the continuity of the race in health and intellectual activity, in spite of unfavourable conditions of climate and political life, is mainly due to the altered diet adopted by the original Aryans, when they first saw the need for it owing to a change in their original environments. And it must be admitted that subsequent experience has confirmed the wisdom of that change. It is within the experience of us all, whether European or Indians, that abstaining from animal food is a great help to intellectual labours, that those whose diet is chiefly animal are less capable of withstanding hunger, fatigue and privation than vegetable eaters, that what is gained in an appearance of force and impulse in action is lost in want of sustained energy.…

Diet. The manner of the diet to be prescribed depends upon the nature of the disease the patient suffers from and also upon the strength of physique that should be maintained for the medicine to be administered. Diseases such as leprosy, rheumatism, chronic ulcers, etc. require a hard diet almost bordering on starvation. Again such medicines as mercury, sulphur, arsenic, bdellium and others when taken in also require severe dieting. There is no hard and fast rule prescribing as to what diet a particular patient should observe when taking a particular medicine, for it mostly depends upon the digestive power of the patient. If his digestion is sound and unimpaired, a hard diet may be conveniently adopted; otherwise, a milder one according as the nature of the disorder will permit, should be observed. But it must always be remembered that the severity of the diet and the strictness of its observance help the efficacy of the medicine administered. Further the prescription of a diet is a matter

solely to be left to the Vaidyan's discretion and not to the patient's choice. There are 5 well-marked conventional kinds of diet as laid down in the *Ashtangahridayam*. They are: 1. Hard diet; 2. Mean diet; 3. Ordinary diet; 4. Every day diet; 5. After supper diet.[1]

A modern Brahmin's account

The following account consists of my notes on a conversation and further discussion with a modem college biology teacher from a Brahmin family that had traditionally specialized in Ayurvedic medicine.[2] Apart from giving a modem Indian's first hand view of traditional medicine, the notes provide an illustration of the use of oral sources in building up the picture of traditional learning that I am trying to put forward in this book. I used an informal approach, inviting comments and ideas as they arose, and later on putting them together into a relatively coherent account. As a result, some of the language in which the account is expressed is mine rather than my informant's. But I am afraid that this is inevitable, in the interests of comprehensibility to my readers. Moreover, I have tried to ensure that the information and the ideas expressed are, as precisely as possible, the information and ideas that were expressed by the informant.

Notes on a conversation with Krishnan Namboodiri[3] *(college biology teacher, about forty-five years old)*

(i) Vedas are *śruti*, meant to be heard, a lot of the meaning comes in the physical utterance and sound i.e. Vedas are to a large extent like mantras in character. Not much importance is given to intellectual interpretation in teaching the Vedas (it takes three or four years to learn a Veda). After learning a Veda, portions from it are used in various household rituals. The meaning of some parts of the Veda is understood (in terms of intellectual interpretation that is); but even his father, whom he called a Vedic scholar, would not be able to understand or intellectually interpret all of the Veda. A lot of this may have been lost in the past, he says. The Vedas are not written in ordinary classical Sanskrit, but have to be interpreted by learning a special Vedic grammar, and the meaning depends to a great extent on the way the verses are chanted. The 'tune' is important in the chanting.

(ii) He did not learn to chant the Veda himself, but went from the age of six (I think) to a school where from the sixth standard (about eleven years old I think) students were taught subjects in English medium. Nowadays, Malayalam medium is used even at the college level, except in the teaching of English and even here written explanations are often given in Malayalam by the teacher. But he did pick up Sanskrit

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[1] There follows a description of these five kinds of diet – pages 569-70, last two pages of Volume II.

[2] This conversation took place in 1973-4, some 70 years after the preceding account by Nagam Aiya.

[3] This is a transliteration of 'Nampūtiri'.

at home and reads books Upanishads, śāstraṁs etc.) in Sanskrit written in the Malayalam script with interpretations in Malayalam.

(iii) He comes from a family which specialized in Ayurvedic medicine (as neighbouring Nampūtiri Brahmin families specialized in mantravāda and astrology). He described Ayurvedic medicine as being dependent on the capabilities of a *vṛddha vaidyan*, i.e. an old and experienced physician, skilled in prescribing the effective combination of drugs and treatments for a particular case.

There are, he said, many very effective treatments and formulae. In the old days, the preparation of medicines would be carried out almost entirely by the household of the patient. The physician did not have much of a dispensary (for example his father had only a very small dispensary, and before his time there was even less by way of what could be called a dispensary).

Previously, Ayurvedic doctors (as for example his father) made very little money out of the practice of medicine. They had their own property and income and, having a scholarly bent of mind, they were not much interested in making money. Krishnan Namboodiri's father, who is a Vedic scholar as well as an Ayurvedic physician and is still alive and in reasonable health at the age of eighty, is a good example.[1]

Traditional physicians would sometimes get payment in kind (rice, coconuts etc.) from patients at the beginning or after completion of treatment (as offerings of gratitude, unasked for). Students were basically taught free and even given free lunch at Krishnan Namboodiri's father's home, and they would accompany Krishnan Namboodiri's father on visits to patients (there was no clinic of course) to observe actual treatment in operation and to learn the practical method of treatment.

Krishnan Namboodiri described his father's daily routine as follows. Having got up early in the morning he would perform pūjas and rituals, then from ten to twelve o'clock (nine-thirty to twelve thirty?) he would teach pupils in the house. The students were given lunch and he would teach them again (in the course of his practice of treatments I suppose) for a couple of hours in the afternoon.

(iv) Krishnan Namboodiri mentioned the reverence for texts, *Aśṭāṁgahṛdaya* in particular. In Aṣṭavaidyan families (his was not one of these) passages from it would be read every day, like religious texts such as the *Bhāgavata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* are read every day in ordinary families.

He speculated that Ayurvedic medicine had been stagnating since the destruction of the old seats of learning (like Nalanda and Taxila) by the Muslims. He suggested that a lot of books might also have been lost then. The classic texts, he said, told one only so much of the art and, however basic and fundamental, they were rather preliminary in character. Much practised knowledge was not made explicit in systematic theory and standard systems of techniques, but was handed down form teacher to pupil through close working contact. In fact many prescriptions and treatments were a closely guarded secret (within families and traditions of physicians) and were thus lost by broken succession.

In connection with a physician's prescriptions, there were various kinds of treatment requiring specially skilled practitioners in special branches of knowledge of the

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[1] The father must also have been intellectually rather broad-minded, for I remember Krishnan Namboodiri, himself a biology teacher, telling me that his (Krishnan Namboodiri's) wife had studied homeopathy with her father-in-law's encouragement and blessings.

human body. As an example, he mentioned *marma vidya*, a branch of knowledge concerned with the marmas or vital spots of the body under physical manipulation (such as massage or physical attack). He suggested a similarity here with acupuncture. There were, he said, theoretical texts and śāstras concerning a branch of practical knowledge like marma vidya or pulse-taking. There is apparently some description of marmas in the classic text *Aṣṭāṁgahṛdaya*.

However, the direct instruction of an experienced teacher is necessary to interpret such theoretical texts practically. A theoretical text is fairly meaningless without such a teacher who knows the practical skills and techniques himself. For example, a vital spot may be described in a text as located two named measures below the nipple, but the lack of a standard measure corresponding to the name in the text would mean that an experienced practitioner would be required to interpret the text and point out the spot.

There are still, he said, practitioners of marma vidya and similar practical sciences to be found in Malabar,[1] but many people made exaggerated claims of their skill and knowledge in marma vidya.

(v) Concerning modern developments in Ayurvedic medicine (i.e. in the last hundred years), he said that the first step was the open public examinations instituted by the government, intended for pupils who would be studying under the personal guidance of a practising physician in the traditional manner. The next step was the establishment of an Ayurvedic college. Nowadays, of course, everything is considerably commercialized, with stipulated fees required for consultations, commercial dispensaries etc.

Note written after further discussion with Krishnan Namboodiri

The effectiveness of Ayurvedic medicine did not lie so much in patent medicines, though there are many of these. The pharmacopoeia and the medicinal materials and prescriptions were not effectively standardized. There were prescriptions in verse, as in *Aṣṭāṁgahṛdaya*, but detailed instructions to interpret them and actually make the medicines were lacking, so that one had to learn from someone who already had practical knowledge and experience.

The basic medicinal substances were supposed to have various qualities ('hot', 'cold', 'dry' etc.) and qualitative effects on the constitution (in particular of increasing or decreasing *vāta*, *pitta* or *kapha* – the three *doṣas* – whose balance is conceived to be a basic factor in human constitution). However, these qualities and qualitative effects of medical substances were not measured by standard clinical or instrumental tests; rather they were guides to an experienced physician's developed sense of judgement in prescribing for the ailment of a particular patient.

Only a *vṛddha vaidyan* or an experienced physician would have developed the sense to know what combination of medicines should be prescribed for a particular case, given the nature of the ailment and the particular constitution of the patient. That a physician of this kind could be very effective in his prescriptions seems to be widely acknowledged in Kerala.

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[1] Skilled practitioners of traditional massage treatments are quite common today in Kerala.

Krishnan Namboodiri said, as the son of a traditional Ayurvedic physician, that yes he knew that traditional medicine could be very effective. But it could not show clinically how its effectiveness was brought about, and what clinically testable and identifiable ingredients were responsible for its effectiveness. Nor could it explain by identifying, as modern clinical medicine does, what relevant mechanism of the body was involved, observable through standard physical instruments and techniques and codified in accepted theory.

5. The Unlettered of Traditional Society

Women's education[1]

I have elsewhere described fully the Hindu wife, her duties, her excellence and her environments. It is not too much to say that she has ennobled 'domestic duty' into a religion. Her duty to parents, to brothers and sisters and elders generally; her duty to neighbours, to priests, and to religious mendicants; hospitality to guests; her duties to the village temple and the household deity; her duty to herself, including personal cleanliness and purity and religiousness; lessons on female modesty and chastity, instruction with regard to the noble examples of such women recorded in ancient books which pass like current coin from mouth to mouth; lessons on the Punyam and Papam[2] of daily acts, the effect of which, she is told, is carried through all future births; her duties to her mother-in-law and to her husband; her duties as a good and dutiful housewife; and then her duties as a mother, nurse and guide to her children; these are considered the highly essential accomplishments of a Hindu girl. No doubt the young girl of today is able to add to her list of accomplishments, by a course of training in modern schools, some elementary knowledge of reading and writing, though the number so educated is still very limited. It is this want that has caused much concern to some generous hearted Anglo-Indian ladies who wish to learn at first hand all the excellences and hardships of Hindu women at home.…

Are Hindu women uneducated because unlettered? Though closer intercourse with Anglo-Indian women is desirable in the interests of our Indian sisters, in as much as this will elevate them and open their eyes to the higher sphere of usefulness occupied by the womankind of western countries and enable them to see better their recognized influence in society, morals, religion and politics, their active participation in the work of their husbands through all the grades and ranks of life from the prince to the peasant instead of a humble, passive, unexpressed subordinate co-operation, their real independence, their healthy love of exercise and open air, their self-reliance and a manly spirit of 'go' in them and above all their force of character due to their nationality and the special environments in which they are placed, it would be a gross mistake to suppose that Eastern women are all savages, ignorant of their rights and duties and altogether incapable of discharging their responsibilities in life, because they have not been taught the three R's or carried through the curriculum of kindergarten and dancing considered so essential to the bringing up of girls, all over Great Britain and Ireland. Such a statement would amount to a calumny, not only to Hindu

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[1] Quoted from Nagam Aiya, 1906, Volume II pages 298, 300, 302, 472-8. For a complementary view, which upholds the traditional ideals of devoted love, but which emphasizes also ideals of independent-mindedness and literate ability for women, see *Indulekha*, an early and classic Malayalam novel written in 1889 by 0. Chandu Menon (English translation by W. Dumergue, first published 1890, reprinted 1965 by the Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., Calicut 1, Kerala). The novel pictures the additional contribution made by an education in English to a young lady of traditional cultivation and Sanskrit education.

[2] *punyam* – virtue, merit; *papam* – sin.

women but to the whole nation. How can Hindu mothers be called barbarous if their sons are among the greatest administrators, judges, lawyers, orators, preachers, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, merchants, men who would have done honour to the most civilized countries of Europe or America? Is such a state of things consistent with the law of heredity as understood in our age? To call Hindu women ignorant assumes ignorance in those who say so. It is a misnomer. Not to be able to read and write is a defect, of course a mechanical defect, not an intellectual one. Reading and writing is only a means to higher education, not an end in itself. How can these women be called 'uneducated' when their intellects have been deeply ploughed and their natures cultivated under a system of education long in vogue in India, though very different from what is known to us at the present day. Otherwise how can they be the mothers of a race of men like Rajah Sir Madava Row, Sir Dinkar Row, Sir Seshiah Sastri, Rangacharlu, Gopal Rao, Ranade, Telang, Darakanath Mitter, Jagadish Chunder Bose, Rammohan Roi, Keshub Chunder Sen, Sir Muthuswamy Iyer, Ramiengar, Ranganadam and a host of others who have illumined the pages of Indian History? In other words how can uncultured women beget highly intellectual sons? How can the intellect of the race have been kept up under the supposition that one half of the community is in a state of barbarism? How do you account for a Hindu woman who does not know to read and write being able to quote a text of Manu, which lays down that pregnant women, children and old people should be fed in the house first even though the Deva Puja is not performed? If a Hindu woman knew the whole code of ethics as contained in the Dharma Sastras of Manu and the whole of the Puranic Literature of the Ancient Brahmins, and if she knew the gist of the discussion that took place in Ravana's council of ministers as to how an ambassador should be treated, how Sri Krishna and the other kings met at the Hastinapura council to decide what questions should be asked and what message should be conveyed to Duryodhana's court, if she knew how the apple of discord was sown in king Dasaratha's household by the hunch-back maid-servant Manthara, and if she had been able to intelligently follow the fortunes of the royal house thereafter, including such minutiae as the relentless Kaikeyi's boon, the distress and grief of her sapatnis,[1] Kausalya and Sumitra, the old king's helplessness, the young Rama's determination to obey his father's behest even if it cost him his crown and his queen, the devotion of Sita, her jungle life, her trials and privations and finally her abduction and cruel incarceration at Lanka, the war of destruction that annihilated the island King Ravana and his forces, the crowning of Vibhishana on his brother's throne, the triumphant return to Ayodhya, the joy of the people, Rama's grateful salutations to his step-mother Kaikeyi first and then to his own mother, the coronation ceremonies, the uncommon devotion and dutifulness of his step brothers to Rama and all the incidents in full detail of what took place thousands of years ago with such cleanness and precision as if they had taken place in her own village and street and under her very own eyes, a knowledge acquired not in one day or by a hurried reading as the present day student's knowledge is of one of Marie Cerelli's fascinating novels, but acquired from girlhood day after day and deeply impressed on her memory by listening to Pundits declaiming it from the temple portals and the street verandahs during fifty years of her life to thousands of men and women of her kith and kin and repeated to her, times

[1] 'sapatni' means 'co-wife'.

without number, in bathing ghats, in temple processions and social gatherings and in the felicitations of every day life by her mother and sister, by her father and brothers, by her mother-in-law and father-in-law, her uncles and aunts in a manner as to make the philosophy of ages part and parcel of her nature, to call such a woman ignorant or uneducated is the grossest calumny imaginable. The Hindu woman appears to my humble understanding to be the most cultured of her sex in any part of the world. They may all be fitly called George Eliots and Misses Edgeworths minus their arts of reading and writing, for their ancient education. has given them the power 'to lift themselves upwards from the merely sensual and etherealize the common wants and uses of life'.…

Female education. The education of women is not new to this country. In olden times the position of women was one of great importance. In the Vedic age the wife was considered part and parcel of her husband. She was indispensable for the performance of his daily sacrifices. She was able to read and write, even to compose songs and hymns. She was skilled in needle-work. She was taught to sing and play on the Veena. Sanskrit literature abounds with references to many educated and learned women. Even the deity presiding over learning is a goddess. Side by side with all this, there was another active kind of education going on steadily in every Hindu household. The young girl is taught the ideal of duty from her early infancy. She is taught to look upon her domestic duties as an all important occupation of her life. To revere her elders, male and female; to respect her husband and to treat it as the sole occupation of her life to please him; to revere him as her god; and to minister to the wants and requirements of all in the household; this was her duty and still continues to be so. Her early training is directed towards realizing this ideal. When in the fullness of time she marries and goes to live with her husband, her mother, father, brothers and sisters, one and all, instil into her young mind the principles of domestic duty and lessons on female modesty and chastity and, in fact, give daily instruction on all points, attention to which would make her a virtuous woman, dutiful, obedient and really helpful to her husband. 'To serve her husband was her religion and her delight. One with him in the household certainly, but moving in a plane far below him, for all other purposes religious, mental and social; gentle and adoring, but incapable of participating in the larger interests of his life… gentle, submissive, a perfect house-mistress moving softly about the woman's domain, the inside. Up with the dawn she bathes and worships… then draws water for the household needs, *scorning no domestic duty*.' This is the type of a perfect Hindu wife, and a girl's early education is directed towards developing in her those qualities which will enable her to reach this ideal more and more. This ideal was reached by the women of India from of old, as I have observed in another part of this book, on a basis of education altogether different from our present school-course. That education secured for Hindu women, refinement and culture of a high order – a fact which though not so well understood by the educated Hindus of the present day, has been again and again recognized by thoughtful and cultured writers of the West – as I was happy to notice even recently in a well-written article in the *Madras Mail* by an accomplished English lady styling herself *An English woman*. She writes:

> Culture usually implies a knowledge of the three R's but may exist quite independently of it, and this the Brahmin woman assuredly proves in my opinion. If 'manners are not idle, but the fruit of loyal nature and of noble mind,' if perfect

correspondence with one's environment is the end of education then the Brahmin woman is cultured. It may be a culture very different from our western product, yet it is a culture perfect of its kind for the purposes of life as it has to be lived by the Brahmin woman.

For many years I went in and out amongst Brahmin families with the object of teaching their women and girls the three R's and improving them generally. Improve them? Improve those gentle amiable manners, that perfect poetry of motion in gait, that artistic yet seasonable and reasonable style of dress; that perfect contentment with the station of life in which they are placed; that sweet domesticity of life that surrounds them, that Spartan conservation to exacting customs that for them at any rate makes 'room to deny themselves – a road to bring them nearer God?' Nay, far from my improving them, they improved me, and often have I on these grounds combated the impression in England that the Brahmin women are crude and uncultured. I certainly succeeded in teaching them the 'three R's' (and with what avidity they learn) but it was a 'something stuck on' – an addition, a very desirable and valuable addition, but in no way going to make them cultured. They were already that in my opinion.…

I often think that in our high western civilization we 'miss that whereto we tend'; and I have much sympathy with Prince Menelick's verdict on his visit to England a few years back. On the eve of his departure to Abyssinia, he expressed himself as highly pleased with his visit. England was a great and grand country, *but he was so glad he was going back to civilization*! We smile, but there is world of philosophy in his words. Life in the west is becoming more and more a matter of rapid locomotion. People are forever motoring, biking, tuppenny-tubing, express-training, bussing, tramming, cabbing or where these fail, perambulating the pavements – always trying to reach a point other than where they are in the quickest possible way, and every point of arrival is only another point of departure. Our richly furnished homes become more and more cubicles and even the old-fashioned hospitality of a dinner must now have a 'hotel' setting.

But we shall awake one of these days to learn what dupes of our much vaunted civilization we have become, and we may yet turn to Prince Menelick and the Brahmin woman for wrinkles on how to live.[1]

Such confirmation of Indian orthodox views by the best specimens of cultured European ladies brought up under altogether different environments and trained to admire other ideals than our own, is indeed refreshing, showing that the best culture of the East is identical in aim and spirit with the best culture of the West. It also shows the general reader what amount of rubbish is often uttered by our so-called educated brethren in the name of education, when such education unhappily is not informed by sympathy or real knowledge.

Owing to immunity from external foes and from the consequent upsetting of social institutions, though only for a short time, female education in Malabar has been more popular than in other parts of South India. The Nayars especially are very earnest in

[1] Nagam Aiya's footnote: 'The Brahmin Woman' – an article in the Madras Mail dated 9th June 1906.

the education of their sisters and nieces. No girl is permitted to grow up to womanhood without a fair knowledge of reading and writing. A knowledge of Sanskrit and of music, vocal and instrumental, are also added in all well-to-do households. The few accomplishments, now considered essential in modem Girls' Schools, were looked upon in old times as mere superficial luxuries and, therefore, education, such as it is now, is of a later introduction. As might be expected the Missionaries were the first to establish Girls' Schools.…

'It is by the position of woman in it that we judge to a great extent of the relative progress made by a community towards the complete life of what we call civilization.' Judged by this standard Travancore is in the forefront of civilization. The Malayali women enjoy a larger share of freedom than is allowed to their sisters beyond the Ghauts, and the system of inheritance through females prevalent in the country, invests them with an importance unknown in other parts of India. Their influence is very marked in society. Many have distinguished themselves in education and a few are poets and journalists. The recently started Sarada is a monthly magazine edited by two Nayar ladies of whom one is an F.A. of the Maharajah's College. The ladies of the Royal household and those of the Koil Tampurans and Rajahs are invariably well educated, and not a few of them are learned in Sanskrit. They are also votaries of music, both vocal and instrumental. Her Highness Lakshmi Bayi, C.I., the late Senior Rani of Travancore, was a great proficient in music. I heard Her Highness sing years ago for about two hours to the accompaniment of Veena and it appeared to me a remarkable performance. She has also composed musical pieces some of which are in my possession. The young Ranis now adopted are being given a high class education as is the practice in the Royal house.

The example of the high-born ladies, the enjoyment of freedom and the importance attached to their position in their families and the large number of schools established by the Government, where free education is given for girls, the liberal aid to private enterprise and the facilities provided for the training of female teachers have all contributed to the rapid spread of female education in Travancore.

Education of the backward classes[1]

…Till the middle of the last century predial slavery existed in Travancore recognized by law. The lower classes formed the agrestic slaves attached to the land and were transferred and sold with it. They were hardly any better than chattels though, it must be admitted, their masters treated them on the whole tolerably well. The first step at ameliorating their condition was due to the spread of Christianity among them by the labours of the missionaries. Once the members of the lower castes renounced their religion, the disabilities attached to their former status vanished. The missionaries were always by their side to espouse their cause, and it was chiefly through their instrumentality that they secured many concessions, which were denied to their Hindu brethren of the same casts, and were freed from some imposts to which the latter were still subject. Education also spread among them, and beyond everything else this paved the way for their betterment.…

[1] Quoted from Nagam Aiya, 1966, Volume II, pages 480-2.

…So as far as educational facilities were concerned they [the lower castes after the abolition of slavery in 1855 A.D. – my note] were decidedly at a great disadvantage. This was the case only with the Hindu portion of these classes, for the missionary schools afforded ample facilities for the education of the converts. On account of the prejudices and exclusiveness of caste the Government and private schools were shut against them, while religious scruples prevented their joining the Mission schools. Thus for long years they remained without receiving the rudiments of education.

…The desire of the Government to afford educational facilities to them took practical shape in the Grant-in-aid Code of 1070 M.E. (1894-95), when for the first time funds were provided for grants being made to schools for backward classes under certain conditions.…

6. An Interpreter of the Spiritual Tradition

Background, education and subsequent activities[1]

Shri Brahmānanda Svāmi Śivayōgi's childhood name was Kāraṭṭu Gōvindankuṭṭi, and as a man in ordinary life he was called Gōvinda Mēnōn. He was born in 1852 at Kollaṅkōṭŭ in Palghat jilla to a well-to-do Nāyar family. Nāyars being matrilineal, he was born and brought up in his mother's family, but his father was also a Nāyar, and he was one of ten sons and a daughter born to his parents.

The biography throws a certain light on the social and cultural background of the time, especially among Nāyars, the author of the biography being himself a Nāyar, and an industrialist and public worker, born in 1890. The excerpts translated and adapted below are intended to give an idea of the traditional education of a Nāyar boy, and of a thinker whose interest in learning emphasized the spiritual and philosophical side of the tradition.

Of course, not everyone of spiritual and philosophical interests propagated a mission and organized institutions of their own as did Shri Brahmānanda Svāmi Śivayōgi (though it must be said that he was not a figure inspiring all-Kerala fame to the extent of his contemporaries Caṭṭampi Svāmi and Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmi). Nor did all spiritually and philosophically interested persons renounce their professional and family lives to devote themselves to exclusively spiritual activity.

But, of those who did take to sannyāsaṁ (renunciation) in this way, some joined ashrams (spiritual institutions) that had already been established in Kerala (the most famous are the all-India Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swami Vivekananda and the institutions established in Kerala by Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmi) and others went travelling through India and to the Himalayas (as Caṭṭampi Svāmi travelled from place to place in Kerala and the Tamilnad and Shri Swami Tapovanji Maharaj travelled through north India and the Himalayas where he spent the latter part of his life).[2]

Upbringing and education

At birth everyone is about equal. Men rise through factors like intelligence, individuality and environment. Firm will and intense effort are necessary for personal development, which otherwise becomes obstructed.

The locality of Kollaṅkōṭŭ was a centre of orthodox, aristocratic Nāyar families, a conservatism strengthened by the importance and fame of the family of Kollaṅkōṭŭ's hereditary feudal chiefs (nāṭuvāṟis). Allowing for the general change of the times, even today the situation of Kollaṅkōṭŭ is more or less just that. In those days Kollaṅkōṭŭ was also a centre of the evils – like social untouchability – of caste supremacy

[1] From Nāyar, 1971.

[2] See Tapovanji Maharaj, 1960 and 1968.

and orthodoxy. It was here that Shri Brahmānanda Svāmi Śivayōgi, who was later to fight successfully against these distortions of tradition, grew up. In his early years, no one was able to see anything special about Kāraṭṭu Gōvindankuṭṭi, as he was then called, but he later grew up to be a reputed spiritual teacher.

Gōvindankuṭṭi's childhood and education were not particularly eventful, but he felt two forces leading him in different directions. His parents and family naturally thrust into him the influence of orthodoxy, but his own thinking was not satisfied by that, and he began to experience an intellectual lack of ease. At first he stood completely restricted within the circle of influence of his parental and family surroundings. He was immersed up to the neck in temple worship and idol worship, in rules and observances, in chanting sacred names and singing devotional songs, and so on.

When he came of age, he learned to write at home and then he went to Kollaṅkōṭŭ Board Elementary School. By then, the rule of the East India Company was over and Queen Victoria had taken over the government of India. The emblems of the old feudal village system were gradually fading, and changes in the method of education were just beginning. The people's leaders had not generally realized yet the necessity and status of English education. Status and aristocracy were all vested in Sanskrit studies, which were not, however, specially organized in schools as they are today. In the tradition of the country teacher, the practice was to approach scholars and get special instruction in Sanskrit from them.

After his education at elementary schools was completed, Gōvindankuṭṭi was sent to study Sanskrit under Shri Patmanābha Śāstrikaḷ at Ālampaḷḷaṁ, a Tamil Brahmin village with many Sanskrit scholars (including Gaṇapati Śāstrikaḷ who wrote *Śrī Rāmagīta*), just across a small river from Kollaṅkōṭŭ. Gōvindankuṭṭi was clever and enthusiastic, and his teacher and fellow pupils had a fine regard for him, for at that time he started trying to write poems in praise of God.

After a while, Gōvindankuṭṭi's father made arrangements for him to continue his studies with another more famous scholar, and so he stayed at his father's home (his own family home was that of his mother, by matrilineal descent) and started studies at Kūṭallūr Śāstrikaḷ's maṭhaṁ, which was nearby. Here he studied grammar, poetry and drama, theory of poetics and so on, and despite his youth he achieved the position of a normal Sanskrit scholar of that time.

It was while he was studying under Kūṭallūr Śāstrikaḷ that Gōvindankuṭṭi's poetic aptitude became apparent. Let me quote a poem composed to the Goddess of Kūṭallūr temple, according to his beliefs then (the poem is in Malayalam and the following is a fairly literal translation):

> Oh Goddess-Mother who reigns in Kūṭallūr temple
> that gives great good!
> Oh Lotus Feet that blossom with the sun's globe,
> crowned with an eternal host of jewels!
> My eternal Mother, I worshipfully bow
> to Your feet in devotion.
> May You end all grief and save me,
> Oh worshipfully, Shri Śaṁbhu's[1] wife!

[1] 'Śaṁbhu' is another name for Shiva.

With great trepidation, Gōvindankuṭṭi showed his poem to his fellow students and placed it before his teacher, Śāstrikaḷ, to see. The orthodox Brahmin Śāstrikaḷ felt great happiness and pride for his pupil that he had turned out to be a poet and devotee of the goddess, and Śāstrikaḷ informed Gōvindankuṭṭi's father of it. Here is another poem composed during the same period (again the original is in Malayalam and the following is a fairly literal translation):

Your foot-slave has no recourse besides Your feet,
    Look after me always, please,
Oh Mother of all virtue, daughter of the Himalaya,
    Ocean of mercy.

It is not difficult to infer from these poems Gōvindankuṭṭi's state of mind at the time. As a child in an orthodox family that carried out the usual forms of ritual worship, devotional chanting and singing and prayer, he sincerely believed in all the worship of idols and in personal gods of varying moods and emotions. But even then, certain new thoughts began to sprout in his mind. There was a particular incident that caused it. The scholar Śāstrikaḷ used to discourse on many truths and principles to his interested students, and one day he recited and explained, with a clear commentary, the following Sanskrit verse:

brahmānandaṁ paramasukhadaṁ kēvalajñānamurttīṁ
viśvātītaṁ gaganasadṛṣaṁ tatvamasyādilakṣyaṁ
ēkaṁ nityaṁ vimalamacalaṁ sarvvadhī sākṣibhūtaṁ
bhāvātītaṁ triguṇarahitaṁ satguruṁ taṁ namāmi

Happiness of the Absolute, which gives supreme content,
    embodiment of pure knowledge,
Transcending all, seen as the Highest, the goal of mantras
    like 'Tatvamasi' ('That art thou'),
One, eternal, pure changelessness, ocean of everything,
    Witness of the world,
Beyond expression and conception, transcending qualities,
    Teacher of Truth, to You, I pay respect.

After listening attentively to Śāstrikaḷ's explanation, Govindankuṭṭi stood up and asked: 'In that case, how can God's power come to be in the Goddess and the temple of Kūṭallūr? Does the idol there have a spirit of some kind?' Though in front of a pupil, Śāstrikaḷ was in trouble. Eventually he somehow managed by saying that the two deities Shiva and Pārvati were forms of an all-pervading power, and hence, if they were worshipped, this achieved the same result as worshipping the all-pervading power, in a somewhat easier way. In later years Shri Śivayōgi himself told his disciple Pandit Gōpālan Nāyar of the incident.

The verse and its meaning that Śāstrikaḷ had recited and explained put Gōvindankuṭṭi deep in thought, and he was caught up in doubt. A sense of something lacking in religious ritual and worship made him uneasy. He put his doubts before his father and mother, asking them: 'Who is God? Where is He? What does He do?' Neither his father nor any other grown-up could give answers putting an end to such questions. They had not thought about it.

In search of a solution to his doubts, Gōvindankuṭṭi was always troubling his mother, who had faith and devotion in God and could not at all answer her son's questions. In her desire that her son should become devoted to God, she tried to turn his thoughts along another path, advising him like this: 'God loves his devotees. He always takes care of them and blesses them. So, beyond true worship of God, we have nothing else to do. Worshipping Dēvi (the Goddess) is a little easier. Dēvi is the Mother, and it is a mother's compassion that is of course greatest.'

Kālidāsa's sentence in the extended poem *Raghuvaṁśaṁ*, 'Jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatiparamēśvarau' ('Worship the parents of the world, Pārvati and Shiva') made the understanding grow in the boy that Pārvati and Shiva were the mother and father of the world. Supreme Shiva, as God, and Shri Pārvati, as the Goddess, stood firmly in Gōvindankuṭṭi. The many letters that he wrote to his disciples in early years with the motto 'Umāsahāya pādāravindābhyāṁ namaḥ' ('Worship the lotus feet of Pārvati for help') are a proof of this. With his devotion to Shiva and Pārvati was born his devotion towards Shiva and Pārvati's son, Subrahmaṇyaṁ. During the period when he was studying at Kūṭallūr, he made the effort to learn Tamil and hence to become acquainted with the books of knowledge in Tamil written by persons of spiritual achievement.

After Gōvindankuṭṭi's Sanskrit education at Ālampaḷḷaṁ and Kūṭallūr, his father took him to the town of Ernakulam (next to Cochin) intending for him an English education as well. The father settled his son in a household he was connected with, and made arrangements for the boy's studies.

During his stay and education at Ernakulam, the intelligent Gōvindankuṭṭi became acquainted with many different kinds of people. The opportunity was useful to his accepting a somewhat broader outlook. He managed to acquire a knowledge of Tamil, Malayalam, English and Sanskrit, and later on he gradually increased this knowledge. In English, his knowledge was moderate; but with a middle school education, according to the standards of those days, he made the effort to read and understand English newspapers. Through his own efforts, he acquired the essential knowledge of English required to maintain contact with English books.

During this period too, he was bothered by new problems: caste, untouchability, and animal sacrifice. He did not feel any rationality in idol worship and ritual, and though he felt that it was dangerous to come out in opposition to social customs and beliefs, even at that time he came to maintain a special individuality among others.

Here is how Shri Śivayōgi was spoken of once by a contemporary, Shri Neṭṭattu Viśvanātha Mēnōn (who was for a long time a teacher in the service of the Malabar district board and the author of many textbooks).

> He was from the first a person of unusual character. Ritual worship, devotional chanting and singing, prayer, and so on were carried out in his home, as is usual in Nāyar homes. In most Nāyar homes there is a ceremony of worship to the goddess of earth, in which the whole family devotedly takes part. On one such occasion young Gōvindankuṭṭi had spoken against the ceremony and left. I myself heard his family elders talking about the incident in pain and sorrow. Gōvindankuṭṭi's obstinacy had been, among other things, that if it were to be for devotion and in order to please God, one must perform rituals and chant mantraṁs oneself, that there was no use at all hiring somebody else to do it.

Nāyar homes of the time were like bhajana maṭhaṁs (meeting houses for devotional chanting and singing). The women and children of the family sat together chanting praises of deities, reciting sacred names, and singing devotional songs. They kept pictures of gods and goddesses, lighting camphor and burning incense before them. Though Gōvindankuṭṭi took part in these, he was often to be seen in solitude, lost in thought. His own father sometimes criticized him for it. Was it perhaps that the signs were not seen in his youth, as in the saying 'The crop can be known when in sprout', that in the future he was to become a famous thinker and a great yogi ? In any case, it is clear that in an orthodox family atmosphere filled with religious devotion, a certain spirit of questioning came to grow in him.

Subsequent career and mission

After his education in the city of Ernakulam, he came back home to the country. His family being reasonably well to do, he did not need to earn a living, but he had to give attention to family matters. His joint family was divided, and he had a new house built for the section consisting of his mother and her children. By now he was called Gōvinda Mēnōn, and; by the matrilineal system followed by Nāyars, he was the head of his section of the family. He had to see that rents were collected, and carry out family and customary neighbourhood responsibilities. In between, he used all his spare time to research into the *Purāṇaṁs* and *itihāsaṁs*. Here is how his sister spoke of this once, when she visited Siddhāśramaṁ (the institution which he later founded).

> My elder brother's pastime was to always read books. He would read and write thickly surrounded by palm leaf manuscripts, *Purāṇaṁs* and the *Bhagavad Gīta* all spread around. For this reason many of his contemporaries jokingly called him 'mauni' ('silent one') and 'muni' ('hermit'). But he answered other people's doubts, explained the meaning of Sanskrit verses, and so on. It was not in his character to leave the house much. I saw him carry out household business as far as possible at home, by delegating work to those whom he sent out.

It must have been from this period that he grew more and more inclined to value the ancient texts in the light of their suitability for listening, their reasoning, and their experience. In order to convert their 'muni' ('hermit') son, his parents arranged a marriage for him, and in deference to their wishes he had to agree to it. His wife, who was then seventeen, later became his disciple, and was eventually well-known as Yōgini Mātāvŭ, chairman of the Ānanda Mahāsabha (the association formed by his disciples).

After his marriage, another responsibility fell upon Gōvinda Mēnōn. He had to take on the job of aṁśaṁ mēnōn that was his inherited family right. An aṁśaṁ mēnōn was the assistant to the aṁśaṁ adhikāri, who was the new equivalent of the old grāma pañcāyattŭ leader. The posts of aṁśaṁ mēnōn and aṁśaṁ adhikāri carried only a nominal salary from the government, but they were posts of considerable status and dignity, conferring more or less full authority in the responsibility of village government. Gōvinda Mēnōn did not like the job, but bore with it at first so as not to upset others who might think that he had destroyed an ancient family post,. He had most of the actual work done by somebody else, but he disliked the atmosphere of bureaucratic status and deference that he was forced into by virtue of the job, and he sud-

denly resigned the position, despite persuasion to the contrary, writing emphatically his reasons for resigning to his superior in a letter in Malayalam verse.

After resigning his job he spent time teaching Sanskrit to young people in the neighbourhood, considering it a means of service rather than a job from which to expect a living. Circumstances there did not allow his scholarship to come to fruition, but he was very fond of teaching and the spread of knowledge.

While he was thus in and around his native place of Kollaṅkōṭŭ, his meditation and devotional activities continued without interruption. Then he was invited, by a Calicut lawyer, to the job of Sanskrit Munśi (teacher) in Calicut Native High School, now known as Gaṇapati High School. The name 'Native High School' came about because the school was organized by locally resident Malayalis, which was unusual then, as most schools were run by the government or by Christian Missions. The school later came to be known as Gaṇapati High School in memory of the school manager Shri Gaṇapatirāvŭ, who became a sannyāsi in the last stage of his life.

Nowadays, the ordinary aim of studying and education is to pass an examination, get a certificate and hence a job. It is to be wondered whether the basic aim of education, the acquisition of knowledge, is being carried out. In Shri Gōvinda Mēnōn's time the aim of studying was the acquisition of knowledge, the elevation of culture, the purification of a person's character, and the performance of social service. Because the Indian cultural heritage was in the Sanskrit language, Sanskrit scholars had then come to be objects of devotion and respect.[1]

Though the period of Gōvindankuṭṭi's life in Calicut was not a very long one, considerable changes occurred in his life during this professional period. He met many people, including those with western education and those involved in the new political, social and cultural movements; he wrote verse and prose and he started training in rāja yōgaṁ (which is concerned with developing powers of the mind through exercises of mental concentration), altering his way of life somewhat and now living in celibacy with his wife. While in Calicut, he was invited to the palace and honoured by ceremonial gifts from the Calicut royal family, for his Sanskrit scholarship and yogic practice. When the period of his appointment at Calicut came to an end, he chose, despite other possibilities, to join the newly started Ālattūr Middle School (now Government Girls' High School), presumably because it was near his home and because Ālattūr was in the country, free from the distractions of town life.

By the time he left Calicut, he was already being addressed as 'Brahmānanda Svāmi'. In 1899, at the age of forty seven, he started his new job teaching Sanskrit at Ālattūr; and he then adopted sannyāsi dress and a completely sannyāsi way of life, enjoying the solitude and the natural beauty of his new country home. Even while he was teaching at the school, he was something of a spiritual leader and teacher, with disciples in many places. He resigned his school teaching job in 1907, at the age of fifty-five, writing a few Malayalam verses of parting advice to his students, after which he devoted himself entirely to activities concerned with his spiritual mission.

His philosophical and spiritual books (in prose and verse, some were translated into English, Hindi and Tamil) were written during a period of thirty-five years, between the ages of forty-one and seventy-six, and he was also known as a poet, a writer of

[1] From here on, the account is more compressed and adapted than translated in excerpts from the original book.

magazine articles, and a lecturer. After his retirement from school teaching, he travelled to many places in Kerala, attending conferences and giving lectures. He established an ashram (a religious or spiritual institution), called Siddhāśramaṁ, at his home in Ālattūr, where he remained for the latter part of his life; and an association of his disciples was formed, called Ānanda Mahāsabha, to propagate his teachings and to take over the properties and management of Siddhāśramaṁ after his and his wife's decease. He passed away in 1929, at the age of seventy-seven. Siddhāśramaṁ is still functioning at Ālattūr.

7. *A Famous Sannyāsi in Modernizing Kerala*

A man of knowledge who was master of many traditional arts[1]

Caṭṭampi Svāmi (1853-1924) is still a figure of spiritual and cultural inspiration in modern Kerala, a circumstance that was brought home to me when, on his funeral anniversary some fifty years after he had passed away, I heard a Kerala state radio programme commemorating him. Historically, he is noted for the part he played in inspiring movements of social and cultural reform, in particular of social uplift and cultural self-respect among non-Brahmins. He was himself born of Nāyar caste, though his interests and the people he inspired were by no means confined to the Nāyar community, for he actively practised the relaxation of caste barriers that had become rigid to the point of inhumanity. Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmi, who was another sannyāsi famous as a cultural founder of modern Kerala and who led a movement of social and cultural uplift among the Īṟava community, was a close associate of Caṭṭampi Svāmi's.

The following biography is reproduced below for the picture it gives of a reputed range of traditional arts and sciences, and also for its account of the impression made by the personality of a man who was accepted as a sage, or in other words, as a knower of ultimate truth.

Caṭṭampi Svāmi amazed people with his mastery of an extraordinary range of traditional cultural disciplines, so much so that he was called 'Sarvakalāvallabhan' meaning 'Master of all arts'; and naturally he became quite a legend, even during his lifetime. What exactly in the following biography is fact, and how much is exaggeration and fancy, is hard to say. But I would like to point out that many stories and incidents are documented through direct witnesses, both documenters and witnesses often being men of some education.

There are several more direct biographies in Malayalam, from which the present biography has been compiled. The author who compiled the present biography is a retired professor of English, and he told me that he had no particular commitment to Caṭṭampi Svāmi nor towards spiritual movements in general. He had returned to Kerala after working elsewhere in India for many years, and he had researched and written the biography because he had been asked to by a friend. What particularly impressed him, he said, was to find that Caṭṭampi Svāmi had been quite plain and straightforward in his way of life and in his dealings with other people, avoiding any display of mystifying qualities and pretensions.

In what follows, the foreword and the main text have been reproduced as in the original biography (with some minor technical editing). The only change that I have made is to transliterate two Sanskrit stanzas, originally quoted in the Devanagri script, and to change and add explanatory footnotes, for the purposes of the present study.

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[1] The biography is reproduced from Menon, 1967, with the kind permission of the author.

Foreword by Swami Vimalananda

A great soul and an equally brilliant mind, Chattambi Swamigal[1] was a remarkable religious peripatetic who lived in the historic Travancore State from 1853 to 1924. He used to spend most of his time at Trivandrum during his last years. In my youth when I was staying there studying in the Maharaja's College I have heard his astonished and appreciative contemporaries describing his unusual accomplishments.

Genius manifests itself in a space-time context expressing itself in its own idiom and local dialect. But the universal note in it is unmistakable. Chattambi Swami's religious quest and discovery, his austere simplicity and great self-denial, his humble sharing with others the light with which he was illumined, and above all his loving tenderness for all living creatures, as illustrated by the many anecdotes reproduced in this brochure, are inspiring for all time.

The Swamigal was not a propagandist or organizer in the modern sense of the world. He strictly adhered to the characteristic virtues of an ideal hermit practising ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha (non-injury, truthfulness, not taking anything by stealth, sexual continence, and living without acquisition) as an exemplar of this mode of life. His religious influence opened the vision of many and gave self-confidence to innumerable people, leaving a mark in the religious attitude of a large section of people in the Travancore area.

Born and brought up in penury and privations, Chattambi Swamigal became a mastermind by his own inborn genius and prodigious intellectual industry. Schooling in the last century was the luxury of the few and beyond the reach of the poor in Kerala, where now literacy and educational opportunities are ahead of most of the other states in India. Access to traditional lore conserved in Sanskrit was also impeded by narrow conventions. In spite of these difficulties Chattambi Swamigal mastered many branches of indigenous learning and acquired skill in music and arts. His painstaking study of Tamil and Sanskrit from competent teachers outside the state gave him a command over Vedanta. His gifted mind found no rest till his proficiency in yoga measured up to ostensible results.

Transport and communication was very crude in those days. Power-propelled vehicles were not on the roads and airway travel was not within imagination. It was in such a period that this stalwart seeker trudged many many miles in search of knowledge, and when he got it, he wandered again as the inspirer of people. Hardly was there at that time in the country liberal education that assured an enlargement of the mind beyond one's own clan or known neighbourhood, because not many went out of their own home county or zilla. People sparsely mixed even with many of their neighbours because of social distance. If rarely a person returned after university education in the presidency-capital or beyond the seas he was looked on as an exhibit. That was the local condition when Chattambi Swamigal strove to extend egalitarian doctrines or liberalize traditional religious rituals and doctrines by his writings and example.

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[1] In the system of transliteration that I have been using, 'Chattambi Swamigal' is written 'Caṭṭampi Svāmikaḷ'. 'Svāmikaḷ' is simply the plural, honorific form of 'Svāmi', used as a mark of respect.

Though Chattambi Swamigal was an anticipator of many liberal trends he was not a pledged social reformer under whose ferocious zeal religion is usually the first casualty. While exposing sacerdotal pretensions and demolishing the ignorant claims of the high-ups in the ladder of caste hierarchy, in his polemical writings, he never excited inter-communal envy or bickerings; he was urged by a sense of historical justice rather than personal pride. By birth though he was occupying a stair somewhat up in the caste ladder he saw through the artificiality and absurdity of it and always extended his hands to those below him to raise them up. His vision of unity (samadarsana) was the outcome of his Vedantic conviction that Atman is Brahman, each man is potentially Divine, that all existence is One – the essence of Vedantic wisdom.

I have much pleasure in introducing to a wider public the life-story of this meritorious personality presented for the first time in English, written by Dr. K.P. Karunakara Menon, with much care and selective insight.

Saints are the common property of humanity. By making the necessary efforts to make available a knowledge of their life and ideas prevalent in one region in others also, across the barrier of language and time, we aid in the emotional integration of the nation and even of mankind. May this slim volume fulfil this end in its own measure!

Childhood

The future sage was born on 11 Chingam 1029 M.E. (1853 A.D.) at Kollur, a village on the outskirts of Trivandrum. Among his ancestors were several illustrious scholars, saints and siddhas. His father was an impecunious Brahmin named Vasudeva Sarma, and his mother Nankadevi of Ulloorkot House.[1] He was the eldest son of his parents. Though he was named Ayyappan, he was called, and later known as, Kunjan. Even as a boy the burden of supporting his family fell on him. He used to make garlands of flowers picked in the neighbouring forests, and take them to the Kollur temple. He would gather vegetables that grew wild in marshy places for the women-folk of the Kollur *madom*[2] and get as payment some cooked rice and a little salt and chillies.

He had no means of attending a school. He learned the Malayalam alphabet from his father. In the evenings he used to peruse the books of boys who attended the village school and he thus learned to read Malayalam and Tamil. Kunjan made it his daily habit to overhear the lessons which a Sanskrit teacher taught the Brahmin boys of the *madom*. One day the teacher came to know of his surreptitious attempts at educating himself. Impressed by the high standard of the young aspirant's attainments, he allowed him to attend his classes. Thus Kunjan achieved considerable proficiency in Sanskrit.

His thirst for knowledge and his aptitude for study prompted a near relative of his to send him to a school kept by Raman Pillai Asan[3] in Pettai in Trivandrum. Here he won the goodwill and confidence of his teacher so that he was made the 'Chattambi' or the Monitor who in the absence of the teacher took his place. This appellation stuck to him and even today he is known by it. The studies at his school were by no means

[1] But he would take his mother's caste, which was Nāyar.

[2] Madom (Maṭhaṁ): the house of a Brahmin, usually a Brahmin of Tamil origin.

[3] Asan (Āśān): teacher.

exacting. His reading of the Ramayana in a voice charged with devotion and his melodious musical extemporizations thrilled his hearers.[1] His wanderings among the corn fields and on the shore of the majestic sea filled him with a sense of beauty and of awe and evoked a sympathetic response in the poetic heart of the young man.

During this period he was often missing from the Asan's house at nights. The Asan was distressed by the suspicion that the youth was being tempted to vice. One night he organized a search party consisting of his pupils. They searched for him at all the neighbouring houses. At last they found him seated near the idol of a dilapidated Kali temple. He was in such a deep trance that he was quite oblivious of the torchlight party looking with astonishment at him.

It was also during this period that Kunjan Pillai showed openly his utter disregard of the inhibitions of casteism. At a time when it was deemed a criminal act of heterodoxy for a Nair[2] to dine in the house of an Eazhava,[3] Kunjan Pillai consorted with members of the latter community and scandalized public opinion by taking his meals at the house of one Parameswaran, the elder brother of Dr. Pappu who later became a well-known social reformer.

An insatiable thirst for knowledge and a memory that knew not what it was to forget distinguished this young prodigy. Very early in life he developed a distaste for light literature. His fellow-feeling embraced all living creatures. If he unconsciously hurt even a worm a stricken conscience kept him sleepless for nights. For all physical exercises and games he had an unusual aptitude. His taste for music was instinctive. Music absorbed him so fully as to make him forget himself and his surroundings. He could himself sing ravishingly. His skill in rendering rare *ragas*[4] was remarkable. He was an enthusiast of *kathakali*[5] and he mastered all the *mudras*[6] of that highly complicated art. His skill in painting was also of no mean order though lack of facilities prevented him from developing it. But the fine arts were not adequate to contain his interests or gratify his spiritual needs. He wanted to unravel the mystery of life, to get behind the seen reality and discover the invisible truth. To this end he studied *vedanta*[7] through the ancient works in Malayalam and Tamil. But he realized that true enlightenment could come only through the guidance of a *guru*. His hearty yearned in agony for such a master.

He conned the face of every saffron-clad sanyasi who passed along the road, sometimes he followed him for a long distance. One day he saw an aged *sadhu*[8] with clotted hair sitting in meditation in the Kollur temple. Kunjan Pillai attended on him

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[1] Traditional verse is designed to be chanted out aloud with musical extemporization. Such chanted reading can be quite an enjoyable and moving art.

[2] Nair (Nāyar): Nāyars are ranked as Śūdras in the four varṇa system of caste.

[3] Eazhava (Īṟava): Īṟavas are a major Kerala caste ranked next after Nāyars. They are considered to be outside the four varṇa system of caste and are therefore of low caste status.

[4] Raga (rāga): Indian music is based on melodic modes called rāgas.

[5] Kathakali (kathakaḷi): the prevalent dance-drama traditional to Kerala.

[6] Mudra (mudra): a kind of symbolic gesture.

[7] vedanta (Vedānta): a system of philosophy.

[8] Sadhu (sādhu): ascetic, hermit.

for several days. When the venerable man was about to leave the place, the young disciple prayed for some spiritual advice. The sanyasi, favourably impressed by the devotion of Kunjan Pillai, taught him the *Balasubramanya Mantra*.[1] After days of due *vrita*[2] when he mastered this mantra, he felt himself, and appeared to others, a different man. A new vigour and zeal energized his heart and the transformation manifested itself in some new powers that he felt and exercised. Children's ailments were cured by him by the application of *bhasma*.[3] His aid was sought to exorcize evil spirits. He assumed the name of *Shanmughadasa*[4] and an overwhelming desire to lead the life of a *sanyasi*[5] was kindled in his heart.

Education

But the claims of the world were not to be discarded easily. Hunger could not be dispelled by Vedanta. A starving mother could not live on spiritual sustenance. Kunjan Pillai had therefore to work for wages. And the seeker after esoteric knowledge had to do hard labour like a common coolie. He used to say in later days that in the construction of the imposing Secretariat buildings, now towering over the city of Trivandrum, he had a share – carrying loads of bricks and sand!

But this was not for long. His relation Krishna Pillai took him with him to Neyyattinkarai. Here Kunjan Pillai became a writer of documents. He was so generous that he used to share his wages with less fortunate members of the profession. Later he went with Krishna Pillai to Bhoothapandi where also he worked as a document writer. Here he learned to read with facility manuscript *grandhas*[6] in Tamil. But finding the strong winds that blew there intolerable, he went back to Neyyattinkarai. To the potential seer and sage writing documents was irksome drudgery and he therefore returned to Trivandrum.

About this time Kunjan Pillai had the opportunity of serving the government. Sir T. Madhava Rayar, the then dewan, decided to recruit some clerks (Kanakkapillais) to the Huzur Cutchery. The dewan assigned some sums in arithmetic to the candidates. Next day every one of them presented himself before the dewan with correct answers. He ascertained from them that Kunjan Pillai had worked out the sums for all of them. The dewan therefore sent for him and put him to a severe test. With the aid of his fingers he made all the calculations correctly. The astonished dewan appointed him as a *Kanakkapillai* on Rs. 4 per mensem. At the end of the month, the salary was raised to Rs 10 in recognition of his extraordinary abilities. But the fair-minded youth returned the 6 rupees explaining that he deserved only four.

Chattambi did not long remain a government servant. An overbearing superior officer refused to grant him leave for a few days. 'I must see you in your seat tomorrow,'

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[1] Mantra (mantra): ritual chant.

[2] Vrita (vṛta): spiritual observance.

[3] Bhasma (bhasma): sacred ash.

[4] Shanmughadasa (Śanmukhadāsa): devotee of the god Subrahmaṇya (Śanmukha – Subrahmaṇya, dāsa – slave).

[5] Sanyasi (sannyāsi): renouncer.

[6] Grandha (grantha): book (here refers to palm-leaf manuscripts).

he roared. 'You will see me in that seat only when I choose to occupy it,' he replied. He was never again seen in that seat.

He now joined an organization whose members met periodically at Pettai to discuss religious questions and to conduct music lessons. The reputed Professor Sundaram Pillai who was then a college student was a member of this society. Here was an opportunity for Kunjan Pillai to get to know in detail the philosophical classics in English. Ayyavu, the manger of the Residency, used to deliver lectures on *vedanta* to the society. From him Kunjan Pillai learned *yogasanas*. He soon became an adept in the performance of every *asana*[1] and an expert wrestler. From Ayyavu he also gained an introduction to the modes of *Vedantic* thoughts in the Tamil classics.

Tamil had a special fascination for Chattambi. To one who had no knowledge of ancient Tamil, the classics of that language remained a closed book. This knowledge he was able to acquire with the help of Swaminatha Desikar who was Tamil lecturer in the college at Trivandrum. Realizing that the Tamil language was the fountain head of all knowledge, he mastered all the great masterpieces of ancient Tamil literature. This engendered in him an eager desire to go to Tamilnad. Desikar introduced him to the great Tamil Scholar Subba Jatapathi who had come to Trivandrum to participate in a *sadas* (seminar) of eminent scholars. At the end of the *sadas* Kunjan Pillai was overwhelmed with joy and gratification when the Tamil savant invited him to accompany him to his birth place Kalladakurichi.

This was a turning point in his life. Subba Jatavallabhar, as the great scholar was known in his own village, was a Telegu Brahmin whose ancestors had migrated to Tamilnad and settled down at Kalladakurichi. In disputation, grammar and Vedanta, Jatavallabhar had no equal, and his house was the place of pilgrimage of the most eminent men of the country. It was in the congenial atmosphere of this place that Chattambi acquired his deep and extensive mastery of all the *sastras*[2] in Tamil and Sanskrit. In a neighbouring house resided a yogi who excelled in yogic practices. From him Chattambi learned all the yogic practices prevalent in Tamilnad. In Kalladakurichi again he became an expert in playing on all the musical instruments then in use. The three of four years he spent at Kalladakurichi laid the firm foundations of his future greatness, and when he bid farewell to Jatavallabhar and returned home the disciple had nothing more to learn from his revered *Guru*.

On his way home he spent some days at Maruthwamala in solitary meditation, without food. He also met a *siddha*[3] from whom he learned *marma vidya*[4] and yoga sastra,[5] and a Thangal (Muslim saint) who initiated him into the main tenets of Mohammedanism.

But although Chattambi had ranged freely over a wide area of spiritual knowledge, he had yet to find a proper *guru* from whom he could learn the way to enlightenment.

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[1] Asana (āsana): The bodily exercises of haṭha yoga are based on physical postures called 'āsanas'.

[2] Sastra (śāstra): Traditional science or system of thought.

[3] Siddha (siddha): a person who has attained extraordinary powers.

[4] Marma vidya (marma vidyā): Science of marmas, the vital spots of the body under external attack and manipulation.

[5] Yoga sastra (yoga śāstra): science of yoga.

Even this rare fortune came to him before long. At Vadiviswaram he saw an aged beggar merrily licking the remnants of food from the leaves thrown away after a feast. Around him were a pack of street curs with whom he shared the refuse. The proceedings roused the interest of some mischievous boys who reacted by raining stones on the old man. But he ignored the missiles that fell on him, and continued his fellowship with his canine brethren. The docile obedience of the dogs convinced Chattambi that the old man had some strange power. He looked intently at him, and the beggar noticing it got up and walked away. When Kunjan Pillai followed him, he quickened his pace. As Chattambi started running, the beggar entered a thick forest and disappeared. The helpless and disappointed youth fell down in a swoon.

The old man noticed the spiritual light that gleamed on his pursuer's face. He knew that the young aspirant was fit to receive his mystic advice. The sage picked up the unconscious youth and communicated to him the effluence of his divine virtue. When Chattambi came under the touch of the holy man he saw before him a luminous halo of super-mundane effulgence. The spiritually enfranchised sage blessed Chattambi by initiating him into the divine mystery through the *Pranava Manthra*.[1]

Towards the status of siddha

It was a transformed and reformed Chattambi that returned home after his sojourn in Tamilnad. Not even the faintest shadow of worldliness overhung his heart. He was completely untouched by the sexual urge that plays havoc with people in warm-blooded adolescence and youth. Mental and spiritual edification was the shining goal towards which he winged his flight. He renounced all worldly comforts and led the austere life of a sanyasi. This spiritual pre-eminence received due recognition and he commanded respect wherever he appeared.

About this time Chattambi received a permanent asylum in Trivandrum. He had a distant relative named Kesava Pillai who was an overseer in the Public Works Department. His wife was afflicted by two incurable diseases – epilepsy and a stomach ailment. The family was in the depth of despair. Hearing that Chattambi had returned to Trivandrum as a *siddha* he took him to his house Kallu Veedu. Chattambi was usually reluctant to resort to the aid of *mantra*, but here he was confronted with a situation in which he could not but use his powers. With a simple rite he cured the lady of all her complaints and blessed her with what was really a new life. The grateful family looked upon their deliverer as a visible god and Kallu Veedu thereafter became his own house. But for occasional nocturnal trips to neighbouring places, mainly in search of rare manuscripts, Kallu Veedu remained his residence at Trivandrum.

Chattambi Swami's reputation as a siddha who cured incurable diseases soon spread. Reports became current that a snake that bit him died and that he could tame animals and make them obey him. But he was himself more zealous in widening the horizon of his knowledge than in working miracles. He got an opportunity to study *Thanthra Sastra*.[2] In the house of the well-known *Thanthris*, the *Potties* of Koopak-

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[1] Pranava Manthra (praṇava mantra): The mantra 'om'.

[2] Thanthra Sastra (tantra śāstra): Theory of tantra, a kind of ritual worship widely used in temples. A 'Thanthri' (tantri) is a priest who practices tantra.

kara, there was a fine collection of *grandhas* dealing with *manthras* and the rites and ceremonies connected with temple functions. Chattambi read all of them and took notes from them. These proved of use to him in later life.

When his official duties compelled Kesava Pillai to move from Trivandrum to Vamanapuran, Chattambi accompanied the family. Kesava Pillai used to get for the Swami's use costly books from Calcutta, Kasi and other places. Swamiji also conducted researches in folk songs, legends and topography, and in the pursuit of these studies he explored the places around. During this period he enriched his knowledge of *Manthravada*,[1] *Ayurveda*[2] and Astrology. It was also now that the *Kalpa Seva*[3] which he commenced at Maruthwamala was completed. There was hardly any green leaf which he did not taste. This led to his being called 'Goat Kunjan Pillai' by the local people.

But the most memorable event of this time was his meeting with Sri Narayanaguru (1058 M.E. or 1882 A.D.). This Eazhava youth had then returned to his native place Chempazhanthi after his studies in Sanskrit. He was already a world-enfranchised spiritualist. His relatives trying to turn him back to the world trapped him into a hasty marriage. Although he went through the forms of the ceremony, he was not diverted from his purpose by the lure of feminine charm. He remained firm in his resolve to pursue yoga and vedanta. A casual meeting between Narayananasan[4] and Chattambi Swami drew them powerfully to each other and a strong attachment was soon formed between them. The Swami initiated him into all the occult lore which he had mastered in the course of years. The ground had already been prepared and the seeds of yoga did not take long to germinate and grow luxuriantly in Asan. The pair then began their wanderings on foot in the southern regions, shunning the haunts of men. They spent several days on sublime mountain heights and impenetrable forests, feeding on roots and berries, drinking from streams and springs, living in caves, consorting with wild animals and practising austere meditation and yoga. There were times of complete isolation from the world of men.

On their way back from the wanderings, one day they reached the spot at which the River Neyyar joins the sea. They decided to explore the course of the river along its arid bed. As they went up some distance, they reached a place called Aruvippuram. They were greatly attracted by this beautiful spot. It was eminently suitable for rest and contemplation. Narayanaguruswami made a mental note of the possibilities of this place as the scene of future activities. He stayed there for some time engrossed in *tapas*.[5] But Chattambi Swamigal moved about in Trivandrum and Nedumangad.

At Trivandrum, two classmates of Narayanaguru, Perunnelli Krishnan Vaidyan and Velutheri Kesavan Vaidyan, became the disciples of Swamiji. Their houses were his abodes during his stay in Trivandrum. Sometimes Narayanaguru himself would join them. In poetic composition, Vedantic discussions and physical exercises the conviv-

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[1] Manthravada (mantravāda): ritual magic, casting of spells.

[2] Ayurveda (Āyurveda): a system of medicine.

[3] Kalpa Seva (kalpa seva): a course of treatment in Ayurvedic medicine, intended for rejuvenation and longevity.

[4] Narayanasan (Nārāyaṇāśān): i.e.. Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmi.

[5] Tapas (tapas): purposeful and intense self-discipline.

ial group fleeted their time. As the oldest and most scholarly of them, Chattambi Swamigal was the natural leader of this genial band. He used to say that 'Kitten (Krishnan) and Kesavan were his two wings,' and that it was to make a poet of them that the Swami himself donned the garb of the poet. But after the departure of the young men he said he never soared on the wings of poesy.

It was not in poetic exercises only that Swamiji trained his young disciples. He was a master of the art of wrestling and he taught them the thrusts and feints of this art. His consorting with the Eazhavas and his interdining with them scandalized the members of his own community. But Swamiji recognized no caste distinctions and he was as free in the kitchen of Perunelli house as in that of Kalluveedu.

Travels

Swamiji soon got an opportunity to show his ability to control any animal.. He was invited one day to dine at the house of an officer. He accepted the invitation – on condition that he should be allowed to bring with him some of his disciples. This vain officer readily agreed, it gave him an occasion to display his pomp and power. Swamiji, on his part, wanted to humble the haughty and corrupt officer.

On the appointed day, the Swami arrived alone. To the officer's enquiry his host replied that his disciples were waiting outside, and he asked the meal to be served. When the leaves were laid and the food served, a pack of stray dogs entered as though in obedience to the Swami's instructions, and sat before the leaves and commenced their meal. The curs that were habitually quarrelsome conducted themselves in an unusually disciplined way. To his host who viewed the scene with astonishment Swamiji said: 'These dogs were high officers in their last life. Corruption, oppression, plunder and other heinous crimes of which they were guilty then have led to their being re-born as dogs. The wages of sin are sure to be paid in the next life if not in this.'

With the transfer of Overseer Kesava Pillai to Moovattupuzha, Swamiji got the opportunity of visiting north Travancore. With headquarters at Moovattupuzha he visited Ettumanoor, Meenachil, Vaikam, Perumbavoor, Edappalli and other places. The temple and its premises at Ettumanoor specially fascinated him, and through his efforts a Bhajana Madam[1] was started near the western gate of the temple. It became a centre of devotional singing and music and prayer. Sometimes Nanuasan[2] joined him at Ettumanoor. It was during their excursions to the neighbouring places that Nanuguru noted the place in Edappadi where he later installed a *mayilvahana*.[3]

Swamiji delighted in bathing in the Meenachil river. He would come to the river early in the morning and return before the sun grew warm. He used to practise a kind of 'enema' to cleanse his bowels. Sitting in foot-deep water he would draw in water into the stomach by *pranayamam*[4] and after half an hour expel it. It was in the interest

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[1] Bhajana Madam (bhajana maṭhaṁ): a maṭhaṁ or house for worship, prayer etc.

[2] Nanuasan (Nānu āśān), Nanuguru (Nānu guru): Shri Nārāyaṇaguru Svāmi.

[3] Mayilvahana (Mayilvāhana): an image of the god Subrahmaṇya with a peacock (mayil) as his vehicle (vāhana).

[4] Pranayamam (prāṇāyamaṁ): usually refers to breath control in yoga, here extended to apply to control of other bodily functions as well.

of health that he used to do this, and he did not like to make a public exhibition of the practice.

At the Ettumanoor temple he once demonstrated in an extraordinary way his extraordinary skill as a drummer. The *utsavam*[1] was in progress and all the drummers and other instrumentalists were getting ready to begin the *mela*.[2] Among the drummers was a celebrated expert called Muntomepilli Marar. Chattambi Swamigal observed a very old man with a drum and worn out drum sticks. He was obviously no more than a dummy, one who could just move his hands up and down without the energy demanded of a player on this exacting percussion instrument. Promising to pay him his wages, Swamigal seized the instrument from him and stood with the drummers in the front row. The mela began. All the instruments vied with one another in the demonstration of their skill. Muntomepilli, finding in the stranger one who seemed to have come to put his skill to trial, employed all his wizardry to establish his superiority over Chattambi Swamigal. But the Swami not only held his own against his famous rival but even launched on some highly imaginative and original improvizations. The vast audience was thrilled. At the end of the mela, Muntomepilli approached Swamigal in great respect and asked him where he had learned his art. '1 did not learn it anywhere in particular,' replied Swamiji. 'By the grace of my guru I learned something, and I just thought that I would try what I could do. That is all.'

On another occasion, when the *Sree bhootha bali*[3] was being performed at Ettumanoor by a famous *thanthri*,[4] the *thimila* was not being played properly. Thereupon Swamiji took over the instrument from the erring artiste, and played it correctly and felicitously to the entire satisfaction of the *thanthri* and the audience.

During this period his mother passed away. His father had predeceased her. Swamigal nursed his mother during her last illness. There after he never again set foot in his house. It was about this time that he wrote his *Christhumathanirupanam* (a review of Christianity). His deep knowledge of the subject of his treatise is evident to every reader. He had read and mastered a large number of books in order to write this work. In the study of books written in English he was aided by his friend Professor Sundaram Pillai. The 21 page summing up of the essence of Christianity has received the unanimous plaudits of Christian priests.

In north Travancore

As his overseer friend had made Moovattupuzha his place of permanent residence, Swamiji also stayed there for a considerable period. His fame spread over the northern Taluqs of Travancore and he attracted scholars of *vedanta* and spiritualists from the countries around. He also travelled frequently between Alwaye and Trivandrum.

His stay at Moovattupuzha is notable because it was here that his first acquaintance with his favourite disciple Neelakanta Theerthapada Swamigal began. Neelakanta Theerthapada belonged to an affluent family in the village of Maradi in Moovattupuzha. He was brought up in the lap of luxury. Yet from his earliest years he was

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[1] Utsavam (utsavaṁ): festival.

[2] Mela (mēḷa): percussion music, including drum, cymbals etc.

[3] Sree bhootha bali (Śrī bhūta bali): offering of food to the bhūtas or spirits.

[4] Thanthri (tantri): a priest performing tāntric rituals.

remarkable for his piety, his devotion to duty and his openness of mind. After his primary education he joined the English High School at Ernakulam. During this time he also acquired proficiency in the treatment of snake bite and in mantras. It was soon evident to his relatives that he was more interested in meditation and *vedanta* than in his academic studies and they encouraged him in his laudable pursuits. He also assiduously studied Sanskrit and cultivated his natural taste for poetic composition.

During this period Chattambi Swamigal was staying in a house belonging to Theerthapada. His yogic powers and his discourses on *vedanta* attracted a large number of devotees to the house. His marvellous power of summoning snakes and making them obey his will became a topic of common talk in the locality. Theerthapada also presented himself before Swamigal with the object of enhancing his knowledge of snake lore. Swamigal soon noticed the exceptional gifts of the youth and decided that he was fit to be guided along the right path. The young man was equally impressed by the Swamiji and he longed to win the honour of becoming his disciple. Swamiji expressed a profound truth in an apparently humorous way when he told the young aspirant for spiritual enlightenment that it was far more important to eradicate the poison in one's own inside than to extract the poison of snake-bite. Under the Swamiji's guidance Theerthapada began the study of Vedantic works. This led to the discontinuation of his English education and he entered on anew and illuminating exploration of the higher realms of the theory and practice of yoga.

The training of his new disciple did not however keep him confined to Moovattupuzha. He went to Vaikam, Perumpavoor, Alwaye, Edappalli and Ernakulam. At Alwaye he was always a welcome guest at. the house of Pappu Pillai, Superintendent of Police, father of Nanthiar Veetil Parameswaran Pillai. At Kollur, Kantan Vaidyan had the honour of extending his hospitality to Swamiji. At Ernakulam, Swamiji was the congenial companion of some of the highest officials and he was received as a member of their own family by Chandulal, a Rajput police superintendent, his wife and children.

It was during his stay at Ernakulam that Swamiji got the opportunity of meeting Swami Vivekananda. This took place in the month of Vrischigam in the year 1068 M.E. (1892 A.D.), at the residence of Rama Iyer, the Dewan Secretary, who was himself a great admirer of Chattambi Swamigal. The two great sanyasins spoke in Sanskrit. Swami Vivekananda introduced the topic of 'Chinmudra' into the discussion, and the illuminating way in which Chattambi Swamigal discoursed on the subject enabled Swami Vivekananda to have a glimpse of '*Kerala Pratibha*'.[1] They had another edifying discussion the next day. Swami Vivekananda is reported to have described Chattambi Swamigal as a 'wonderful man.'

It was not our Swami's habit to stay for long in one place. And so he left Ernakulam and went to Vaikam, Shertallai and other places. At Kulasekharamangalam he made the Eazhava house of 'Puttanal' his home for some days. Sree Narayanaguru was also present here for a time. 'Puttanal' was the meeting place of a band of physicians, and Swamiji was acknowledged as the dominating figure in this galaxy of *Ayurvedic* experts and scholars. An incident which happened at this time bears testimony to the mystic powers that he undoubtedly possessed.

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[1] Pratibha (pratibha): genius.

A ferocious Shencotta dog belonging to the excise inspector of the place broke loose and was a terror to the whole neighbourhood, biting and wounding a number of people. The owner found that he had no alternative but to shoot the animal dead. As it was tearing a ram and feasting on its flesh the inspector climbed a tree and was getting ready to shoot the dog. A large number of people collected and stood at a safe distance. Hearing about this, Swamiji came out of 'Puttanal' with some of his associates, saying: 'Let us have a look at this dog. Has not a man more mental strength than a dog?' He left his companions at a distance and proceeded towards the dog. The animal pounced ferociously on the Swamiji. The crowd yelled in terror at the prospect of the Swamiji being torn to pieces. But the next moment the astonished crowd saw Swamiji smilingly humming a tune and walking up and down, leading the dog by the ear.

Swamiji moved from place to place. He stayed at Shertallai, Thurvavur and Parur. During these peregrinations he met Padmanabha Panicker, then a boy, who followed the Swamiji like a shadow and served him with the utmost devotion in his last days. At Parur, in 1075 M.E. (1900 A.D.) he accepted Paramahamsa Swamigal as his disciple and took him up several steps in the ladder of spiritual and yogic lore. Among his favourite admirers was Achuthan Vaidyan of Cherai in whose house he was frequently a very welcome and honoured guest.

'Prachina Malayalam'

While Swamiji was sojourning in north Travancore a new light appeared in the social horizon in south Travancore. This was in the form of an attempt at raising the Nayar and Eazhava communities. The leaders of these movements of reform were C. Krishna Pillai and Sri Narayanaguru respectively. The divided leadership of the Nayars hampered the efforts of C. Krishna Pillai while the Eazhavas acknowledged Guruswami as their undisputed leader and united themselves into a well-knit community under the auspices of the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam.

An effort was made by the Nayars to bring Chattambi Swamigal into the arena of social reform. But he was unwilling to take up the leadership of a community that had lost its moorings and he left the task of organizing the Nayars to Sri Nilakanta Theerthapadar. In response to the insistent requests of his disciples and admirers, Swamiji however agreed to place at the disposal of the Nayar community the benefit of his deep and extensive scholarship and research and his wide and varied experience. His contribution in this field is the work entitled *Prachina Malayalam*.

On this work he was engaged for several years. In the course of his travels, when he found it convenient, he would write a few pages at a time at one place. These pages he would leave to his disciples there to copy out and preserve. It was in this way that he wrote at several places and several periods the three parts of *Prachina Malayalam*.

The absence of a complete copy in the author's possession made it difficult to publish the series of chapters that make up the whole work. Only Part I of the book has been printed. By examining the ancient history of Kerala he aimed at establishing the pre-eminent position which the Nayars enjoyed in this country. In the Second Part the

author's thesis is that the Nambudiri, Embran and Potti[1] are really Nayars. In the third part he intended to give to the public all the ancient *granthas* which he could collect. Citing several old classics, Swamiji contends that Malayala Bhoomi[2] belonged to Nayars and not to the Malayali Brahmins who are really settlers from outside.

Way of life

A broad and *bhasma*-marked forehead, brows expressing undaunted courage, eyes overflowing with humanity and compassion, a face that bespoke friendliness and amiability, a beautiful, flowing, silvery beard, a broad and muscular chest, long hands, speech that was sweet and pregnant with meaning, soft murmured melodies – that is a living picture of Swamiji. Add a loin cloth, a ring made of iron and an old umbrella – you complete his accoutrements.

He had no home or intimate personal friends of his own. The world was his family, all living things his brothers. He flitted about from place to place like the carefree singing birds. He was equally happy in the houses of the affluent as in the huts of the poor. But of one thing he was particular – he would not eat food cooked in a, kitchen which prepared non-vegetarian dishes. Equally strong was his dislike of alcoholic liquor, and he availed himself of every opportunity to condemn the vice of drinking.

He lived a life of austere simplicity. He studiously avoided luxury and ostentation. His refusal to accept the hospitality of Sri Sankaran Tampi, the Maharaja's favourite, and of Dewan Rajagopalachari is famous. Accustomed to starvation in his early days, he had no difficulty in forgoing food for days. Wherever he was, he would share his food with ants, dogs or cats, and they would somehow gather round him during meal-time.

He slept on a simple coir cot or on the bare floor. He was only particular about fresh air and ventilation. As he used no saffron robes and other marks of saintliness, he looked no different from a rustic. He had a lively sense of humour and he rippled with hearty laughter at his own jokes. The playful names by which he addressed his associates were enjoyed by them.

He ignored all distinctions of caste. In the pursuit of his studies he had consorted with Muslims and Channans. He made many Eazhava homes his own. One day when he went to Perunnelli house the women were husking paddy. He collected all the pestles from them and himself completed their work for them in a short time. He used to address Sri Narayanaguru affectionately as 'My Nanan' and Kumaranasan as 'my darling Kumaran'.

The world's greatest men have all been fond of children. Swamiji's relationship with boys and girls was unique. His ability to call together a world of children, to immerse them in a flood of joy and, at the same time, to keep them in complete control was something marvellous. He drew towards him even peevish and shy children. His fondling touch cured them of their frowardness. He would organize impromptu programmes that would stimulate their intelligence and exercise their bodies. They would dance on his back or swing on his beard. One day he kept some

[1] Nambudiri (Nampūtiri), Embran (Emprān), Potti (Pōt́t́i): different kinds of Brahmins living in Kerala.

[2] Malayala Bhoomi (Malayāḷa bhūmi): the land of Kerala.

leading notabilities waiting for an hour, for he was playing with the children and he would not disappoint the little ones by interrupting their enjoyment to meet the grown-ups. The women of the houses where he was received were also full of respect and regard for him.

He was very considerate to all his associates. He took care to see that those who accompanied him on his tours and visits were as well treated by his hosts as he himself was. He was very skilful in opening the eyes of foolish people to their folly. A greedy man once associated himself with Swamiji with the object of learning the art of transmuting copper into gold. One day the master and the disciple were crossing the ferry at Arukutti in a small canoe. There was a squall and the canoe capsized throwing both of them into the deep water. Swamiji knew swimming but his companion did not. The latter made desperate efforts to keep himself afloat. Swamiji now offered to teach him the secret of turning base metals into gold. But the drowning man cried out that he only wanted him to save his life. Swamiji thereupon helped him to reach the shore in safety.

His indifference to wealth was well-known. Even when travelling on foot he did not burden himself with any money. Whatever money was essential was left with his companions. 90 acres of forest land which were registered in his name were promptly gifted away by him to his disciple Padmanabha Panicker. He was a strict brahmachari. From his tender years he conquered all carnal desires and this enhanced his physical and spiritual strength. He despised all publicity. Perhaps this would explain why he established no order and founded no institution to propagate his teachings. Among his leading disciples were Sri Narayanaguru Swamigal, Sri Nilakantatheertha Swamigal, and Theerthapadaparamahamsa Swamigal. Many people sought spiritual counsel from them instead of from Chattambi Swamigal himself. These and numerous other disciples of Swamiji made a significant contribution to the social and spiritual reform of the people of Kerala.

After Sashtipurti

Swamigal was approaching his sixtieth year. His disciples and admirers were keen on celebrating the occasion. The contemplated celebration was not one of ostentation and extravagance, this would not have been countenanced by Swamiji. Their intention was to open an *ashram* as the centre of spiritual instruction and training. It was Theerthapada Swamigal who took the lead in this effort. He thought Ezhumattur a most beautiful and suitable site for the location of the *ashram*. Vatakke Koikkal Anujan Ramavarma Tampuran generously donated for the purpose two excellent buildings constructed in the modern style and the land on which they were situated.

Swamiji's *sashtiabdapurthi*[1] fell on the 8th of Chingam 1089 (1913 A.D.). Ezhumattur was crowded with the devotees of Swamiji. At a simple meeting presided over by Swami Dayananda, speakers expressed their respect and admiration for Swamiji. Honours were showered, and the title of 'Vidyadhiraja Theerthapada Paramabhattara'[2] conferred, on Swamiji by distinguished scholars. Though Swamiji, in his usual hu-

[1] Sashtiabdapurthi (ṣaṣṭyābdapūrtti): sixtieth birthday, an occasion for special celebration.

[2] Vidyadhiraja Theerthapada Paramabhattara (Vidyādhirāja Tīrtthapāda Paramabhaṭṭara): the titles mean respectively 'sovereign of learning, holy feet, supreme venerable person.'

mility, said that he preferred to be known by the old name ‘Chattambi,’ thenceforth he is known as ‘Vidyadhiraja’ and also as ‘Paramabhattara Swami’. A volume entitled ‘Sashtipurthiprasasthi’ containing verses wishing long life to Swamiji was released on the occasion. At the end of the meeting Swamiji declared open the ‘Paramabhattarasramam’.[1] He also founded a *sanyasi parampara*[2] under the name of ‘Theerthapada-sampradayam.’ Its aim was to propagate the methods of yogagnana[3] in accordance with the culture of Kerala and the *ashram* was to be its headquarters.

In response to the earnest solicitations of the Vadakkekoil Thampurans and Paramahamsa Swamigal, Swamiji rested for a few days at the *ashram*. He led a life of peace and tranquillity befitting a sanyasi. There was sweet music both vocal and instrumental. The wild growth around the *ashram* was zealously cleared and every effort was made to make Swamiji’s life comfortable. But the *ashram* did not produce the expected result. In course of time the working of the *ashram* proved to be a failure. The absence of selfless workers was probably the reason for this. Swamiji was not able to stay permanently there. With Paramahamsa Swamigal away on his travels and Nilakantathirthapadar making Karunagappalli the place of his permanent residence the affairs of the *ashram* slumped.

About this time there arose an unfortunate controversy as to whether Swamiji was the guru of Sri Narayanaguru Swami. This is an undisputed fact acknowledged unequivocally by both the Swamis. Sri Narayanaguru Swami has, in two significant verses in epigrammatic style, expressed his great respect and admiration for his deceased guru:

> sarvajña ṛṣirutkrāntaḥ
> sadguruḥ śukavartmanā
> ābhāti paramavyomni
> paripūrṇakalānidhiḥ
>
> līlayā kālamadhikaṁ
> nītvā ’nte sa mahāprabhuḥ
> nisvaṁ vapuḥ samutsṛjya
> svaṁ brahmavapurāsthitaḥ

> The all-knowing seer the *Sadguru*[4] has flown up along the track of Suka.[5] He shines in the highest firmament in the plenitude of his aesthetic lustre, like the full moon. The great master, after spending his days in *leela*,[6] has attained his inherent Brahma entity, after discarding his mortal frame in the end.

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[1] Paramabhattarasramam (Paramabhaṭṭarāśramaṁ): The ashram founded on this occasion.

[2] Sanyasi parampara (sannyāsi parampara): a traditional succession of sannyāsis (renouncers).

[3] ‘Yogagnana’ (yoga-jñāna): Yoga means ‘harnessing’ or ‘union’ and refers specifically to the path of meditation. ‘Jñāna’ means ‘knowledge’, and refers specifically to the path of philosophical enquiry. So ‘yoga-jñāna’ implies an ultimate spiritual enquiry, making use of both yogic meditation and deeply reasoned reflection.

[4] Sadguru (satguru): teacher of ultimate truth.

[5] Suka (śuka): means both a bird and the sage Śuka.

[6] Leela (līla): divine play.

Nevertheless an attempt was made by some people to deny this fact. The guru and the disciple wisely desisted from taking any part in this unseemly dispute. For really, each has a glory that is independent of the other.

The fire of another conflict that had the possibility of growing into a conflagration was fortunately extinguished in time. In the introduction to his *Mokshapradeepam*, Brahmanandaswami championed *yogamarga* at the expense of *gnanamarga*.[1] In response to the persistent solicitations of his disciples Chattambi Swamigal wrote a refutation which he had the generosity to withhold from publication at the request of the disciples and well-wishers of Brahmananda Swamigal. The refutation is not a mere refutation, it is a 'vignanakosam', a work that establishes the greatness of 'gnana'.

Vedadhikara-nirupanam

Till recent times scholarship was considered the monopoly of the Brahmins. It is therefore no wonder that the study and the teaching of the Vedas were the close preserve of the members of that community. Among the few non-Brahmins who had dared to trespass into the forbidden ground was Thunchath Gurupadar.[2] Chattambi Swamigal was filled with a firm determination to break into the citadel of orthodoxy and establish the right of everyone to study the Vedas. He had spent years in making himself conversant with sacred books and the culture of ancient times. His Vedadhikaranirupanam was a work capable of being published in two or three volumes. Of this treatise, written by him in pencil, we have got only a part in book form. The rest of the book has been lost to us.

The traditional view was that Brahmins can learn and teach the Vedas, Kshathriyas and Vaisyas can only learn them, and Sudras can neither learn nor teach them. Swamiji has successfully exposed the error of this view with abundant evidence cited from ancient books.

Besides *Vedadhikaranirupanam*, Swamiji has written several treatises discussing the philosophy of Advaita. Entering the field of Advaita through the gateway of Sankara's exposition Swamiji traverses the entire area and reaches the utmost bounds of this esoteric realm. The facility with which he elucidates the most subtle and complex metaphysical problems is really admirable. About this time happened an incident that deeply grieved him who was above grief and joy. It was the passing away of his dear disciple Sri Nilakantathirthapadar. Swamiji received the painful news when he was enjoying a musical concert. He started at once for Karunagappalli. He was profoundly moved to see the lifeless body set in a sitting posture. Gently patting the head of his disciple he mused aloud, 'A great world created by Brahma has dissolved. It was the custom for him to stand before me and for me to sit. Today I am standing and he is sitting.'

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[1] Yogamarga (yogamārga), gnanamarga (jñānamārga): the paths of yoga (spiritual exercises of meditation) and jñāna (enquiry after knowledge and understanding) respectively.

[2] Tunchath Gurupadar (Tuñcattŭ gurupādar): Tuñcattŭ Eṟuttacchan, who wrote the classic, revered Malayalam versions of the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and some *Purāṇas* (in the sixteenth century A.D.).

The master of all arts

Swamiji belonged to an age in which anyone might study astrology, Ayurveda, magic. But Veda, Vedanta and grammar were the close preserve of the higher castes. Swamiji was one who encroached into this forbidden territory and astonished and thrilled Kerala.

Swamiji's unparalleled mastery of diverse fields of knowledge was the outcome of his capacity for remembering what he had learned. This rare gift was inborn, not acquired. It was smelted and purified by his *yogasiddhi*[1] and it thus attained perfection. Mahakavi[2] Kotungallur Kochunni Thampuran has observed that he understood the extent to which human intelligence could be developed and perfected from the conversation between Swamiji and Kaikulangara Rama Warrier.

His ability to reproduce from memory what he had heard just once was tested by Puthezhath Narayana Menon. Swamiji did not know English. Narayana Menon read twelve lines from an English book. Swamiji reproduced correctly seven lines (although they were no more than unintelligible sounds to him), when he was interrupted by the arrival of a guest.

For Swamiji all learning was only a refreshing of his memory. There was a uniqueness in the way in which he cleared the doubts of others. He had an original and telling reply to every question. He could read a deep meaning even into the simplest nursery rhymes. His knowledge of Nyaya, Vyakarana, Vedanta, Meemamsa, Elakkanam[3] etc. was thorough and impeccable. Arrogant scholars who tried to test him were themselves brought to. their knees. In criticism and discussion none could get the better of him. He had mastered every nook and corner of Tharkasastra.[4] His lucid and facile exposition in Malayalam entitled *Tharkarahasyaratnam* was well known to many of his disciples, but it is unfortunately lost to us.

There was no field of scholarship which he had not explored and conquered. In Astrology, Vaidyam and Mantravada[5] his knowledge was profound. His gift of prediction and prophecy was divine. Although he was an expert Mantravadi he was averse to practising the art. In the rites of Mantravada he was known to have banned the sacrifice of animals and to have suggested the use of cucumber[6] in their place. A master of the theory and practice of Ayurveda, he had a thorough knowledge of medicinal plants and was an adept at curing all ailments by the use of simple herbs. He had secret specifics for smallpox, cholera, epilepsy, malaria etc. There are living today those who can bear witness to the wonderful efficacy of his prescriptions. But

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[1] Yogasiddhi (yogasiddhi): yogic accomplishments, powers and abilities attained through meditation.

[2] Mahakavi (mahākavi): a literary title meaning, literally, 'great poet'.

[3] Nyaya (nyāya): logic; Vyakarana (vyākaraṇa): grammar; Vedanta (vedānta): a system of philosophy; Meemamsa (mīmāṁsa): a system of symbolic interpretation; Elakkanam (elakkaṇaṁ): Tamil grammar.

[4] Tharkasastra (tarka śāstra): theory of tarka or debate, overlapping considerably with nyāya or logic.

[5] Vaidyam (vaidyaṁ): medicine; Mantravada (mantravāda): ritual magic.

[6] In Kerala, there are many varieties of cucumber, some of which may weigh upto many kilograms apiece.

he practised medicine only in response to pressing solicitations. What fully fascinated and engrossed his mind were literature and music.

He was a versatile artist, but his favourite art was music. He was not only a singer but also a composer. His skill in playing on any instrument with originality was well known. Among the instruments which he played with especial proficiency were percussion instruments like the *Chenda*, *Maddalam*, *Udukku*, *Mridangam* and *Edakka*, *Villu*, *Thappu*, *Pandi*, *Nanthuni*, *Thumburu and Ginjira*. He would enthral his listeners by, the way in which he rendered songs in the Telugu, Carnatic and Desya styles. To keep time he required no other aid than the iron ring on his finger. At concerts it was torture for him to hear *apasruti* or *avathala*.[1]

He could play on the drum with a *kunnikkuru*[2] placed on the outer palm of his hand, and he was capable of evoking exquisite music by deftly running his fingers over the strings of the *Edakka*. His favourite accompaniment (instrument) was the *Ginjira*, and some Brahmins and some Pathans from other parts of India have marvelled at the deftness of his hand in playing this instrument. One day the celebrated *Thakil*[3] specialist visited Swamiji. Swamiji's demonstration of his skill in playing on the *Ginjira* so astonished him that he exclaimed: 'Swamiji is Murugan[4] himself.'

If he could get a copper pot, he would place it on his stomach and start drumming on it. He could produce sounds like those of the *Jalatharanga*.[5] His voice was low and pleasing. In music he had not only taste but scientific knowledge and practical skill. He dealt with musical instruments as though they were live things. Those who have witnessed the scene of Swamiji enthralling his audience with a world of sounds of his own creation recapture it even today with rapture.

Swamiji was equally interested in acting. His proficiency in rendering *Kathakali* songs and acting scenes with originality has received high praise from experts. He did not develop his skill in the art of painting.

He is not famous as a man of letters. Literary grace is often adversely affected by the depth of thought characteristic of all his writings. His poems and writings are the offspring of necessity and external compulsion. He was ready to write only when he could not help it. To scribble on bits of paper in the course of his travels was his method of literary creation. It was unusual for him to follow any prescribed programme of work or write on any set subject.

His compositions have come out in the various forms of single stanzas, bhajana songs, articles, reviews and letters. Although endowed with an inborn literary taste, he did hardly anything to promote or develop it. His isolated single stanzas of verse have a beauty arising from the combination of felicitous and polished words. His bhajana songs have a rare melody and a sweetness of diction. His articles are usually incomplete, *Sarvamatasamarasyam*, *Punarjanmanirupanam*, and *Adibhasha* are among his longer works. *Sri Chakra Pooja Kalpam* is an interpretative treatise. The variety that is represented by these works illustrates the width and comprehensiveness of his

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[1] Apasruti (apaśruti): wrong note, discord; avathala (avatāḷa): mistiming.

[2] Kunnikkuru (kunnikkuru): the seed of a plant.

[3] Thakil (takil): another musical instrument.

[4] Murugan (Murukan): the god Subrahmaṇyaṁ.

[5] Jalatharanga (jalataraṅga): water wave.

scholarship. They are informative and serve to enhance our knowledge. His *Christumatanirupanam* and *Mokshapradipa Khandanam* could not be considered works of great values. But *Vedadhikaranirupanam* is a notable contribution to critical literature.

When we think of his literary work his letters could not be ignored. Though his apostrophes etc. have a taint of exaggeration they are really only a reflection of his guileless nature. His handwriting has a special beauty. The letters are arranged neatly without one flowing into another.

Swamiji's works have contributed to the development of Kerala culture. They served to let the tide of Hindu spiritual influence rise. It is not a beauty-worshipping man of letters that we see in his works but a seeker after truth, a revolutionary and sweet singer. The sense of duty that our ancient works have transmitted to us has been endowed with a beauty and brightness by Swamiji's works. Strength and purity of language, persuasive power and depth of thought give his works a pre-eminent place in the literature of scholarship and culture.

He has also a high place among the research workers. His researches were not merely in the field of language. Even in geographical research he was greatly interested. With no more equipment than a pencil stump and a few sheets of paper torn from a schoolboy's note book he would launch daringly into the obscure regions of the history of Kerala and the Dravidian languages. The materials were all stored up in the vast treasure house of his memory. Folk songs, local customs, historical stories were all safely preserved in unparalleled profusion and clearness in his retentive mind. He had the gift of investigating every problem with complete objectivity and thoroughness of detail, and of getting at the central truth. His *Pracheena Malayalam* and *Adi Bhasha* are a precious mine of information to research workers.

Adi Bhasha was written in Tamil and he had it translated into Malayalam by Pannisseri Nanu Pillai. In it he has quoted liberally from rare Tamil manuscripts. He has established that the continent to the west of Ceylon was the place where animal life originated and that the first language to be evolved was Dravidam. Although Swamiji's conclusions are controversial the firmness with which he has established them brooks no denial. Swamiji has also studied the origin of place names. His researches in this field have led to many new and original conclusions. But unfortunately this work has not been preserved for us.

He was indeed the fountain-head of all knowledge. It is said that there was nothing that he did not know, that he had in fact known everything. Like the rainbow which blends and radiates all colours in ravishing harmony, so his shining intelligence absorbed and reflected the essence of all arts. But he was too modest to display and, unfortunately, others were not eager to draw out of him, the many-splendoured treasures of his knowledge. Well has he observed: 'Knowledge is madness to the world; the world is madness to knowledge.'

Divinity

The divine power which sages and saints have acquired is a manifestation of the inner beauty of their deep and broad minds. They are most reluctant to display their spiritual power. If on rare occasions they are unavoidably compelled to show it, their intention is not to win credit or impress others.

The spiritual powers that Chattambi Swamigal had mastered were innumerable, but he was ever averse to manifesting them. If at times they had to be exercised he did not want to focus the attention of others on them. He himself would not speak about them. Our knowledge of them is, therefore, confined to the reports of eyewitnesses. Among those who were blessed by their association with him and those who had witnessed with astonishment his miraculous performances some are still living. We shall just note down the accounts given by a few of these eyewitnesses.

Payappallil Karunakaran Pillai says:

> Swamigal used often to rest in my house when he came to Parur. He used to stay in the *patippura*.[1] It was about the year 1070 (1895 A.D.). I had brought a timepiece from Bombay. It was then a rare object. During day time it used to be kept in the *patippura*. At night it would be taken into the house. One night when Swamigal was in the *patippura*, I wished to take the time-piece into the house. He used to sleep with all the doors open. As I was afraid that it might be stolen, I thought of removing it to the house. But he assured me that when he was there nothing would be stolen. Therefore I left the timepiece there and went into the house to sleep. Intending to test Swamigal, I woke up long before day break and went to the *patippura*. There I found him sound asleep. I tried to remove the timepiece. But wonder of wonders! The moment my hand touched the timepiece I was paralysed as though by an electric shock. I was unable to take my hand off the timepiece or to leave the place. I was rooted to the spot. Soon Swamiji woke up and saw me standing tied down to the timepiece. 'You need not have tested me; you can now leave,' he said. That very moment my hand was released from the timepiece. He revealed then that he had the power of binding any object to any place.

One day he was on his way from Kollur to Alwaye with two disciples. When he had reached the spot in front of the church at Edappalli, his progress was interrupted by a band of young men who were drunk. But he was never in the habit of retreating. Asking his companions to hold him by the back, he held his stick horizontally in front of him and with bated breath he bounced forward. Those who felt the touch of the stick fell to the ground. Thus he continued his journey without difficulty. It was only the next day on his way back, after he had administered the counter stroke, that the ruffians were able to get up and move away.

One night Swamiji found himself in the midst of a group of Nayar rowdies who were practised wrestlers. Finding no other means of escaping from the place he flung himself about with agility. Every one of them measured his length on the ground. By the time they were able to get up they saw him standing at a distance. They fell at his feet in worship.

He had an unparalleled knowledge of *marmayoga* (science of the vital spots of the body) with a demonstration of which he used to keep his audience spellbound. He had again an astonishing control over the animal world. Wild and cruel animals, snakes and other creeping creatures would obey his orders in docility. Karumpuvilakam Govinda Pillai once accompanied Swamiji to Malayattur. As they were standing by the side of the river, they heard a loud hissing sound. They soon heard the sound of a

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[1] Patippura (patippura): gate-house.

large frog splashing into the water. Pursuing it was a terrible cobra with its large hood spread out. Govinda Pillai was stricken with terror. Swamiji ordered the serpent impatiently: 'You there, don't touch it. Away!' The serpent which was hardly three paces away from Swamiji's feet, instantly folded its hood and crept away slowly.

Another incident is reported by Mavelikkara G. Krishna Pillai. One Sunday evening Swamiji was on his way to the temple. Behind him walked Magistrate Andy Pillai, G. Krishna Pillai and a few others. A *chera* (rat-snake) which was being pelted with stones by some boys crept fast in front of Swamiji. Andy Pillai was frightened and he pointed it out to Swamiji. 'You are so afraid of a *chera*?' he said, and he at once sat down before the snake and extended his hand. 'Come, son! Do not be afraid, come,' he said kindly to the terrified snake. It lifted its head slowly, crept towards him, licked his hand and wound itself round the extended hand. After a few moments Swamiji got up and helped it over the mud wall on one side of the road. 'Never hurt animals', he said to his companions; 'if you love them truly they will also love you.'

Even wild animals became docile before Swamiji. Once a man from Parur reached the newly cultivated area in Kodanad. Swamiji was out in the open. His disciple and the newcomer set out in search of Swamiji towards the hill side to the south. From the hill top, looking around, they saw Swamigal facing a terrible tiger in the southern valley. Their fear and anxiety were indescribable. To save their lives they climbed up a neighbouring tree and remained there trembling and helplessly watching what was happening. They heard him saying something to the tiger. A little later they saw the animal turning and walking away into the teak forest while Swamiji began to climb up the hill. He had really pacified with the gestures of his hand and sent away the tiger which had pounced upon a cow. In the deep forests of Kodanad, Swamiji had encountered tigers on several occasions.

Frogs, ants and squirrels used to gather round him. Sri K. Nanu Pillai who visited him in his residence at Kodanad found in his room a large number of frogs of different sizes and colours. They were hopping about in his room; some were sitting on his mat and in his easy chair. To the surprised visitor Swamiji explained: 'All these are my friends. They are unable to range freely in the open. There are many heartless creatures in the holes in the verandah and in the thickets around which would swallow them up. They have therefore sought shelter near me.'

It was certain that he used to exchange ideas with ants. Sometimes they used to cover his feet like socks.. He would then carryon a happy conversation with them. There are many still living who have seen squirrels receiving food from his hands. Rats would obey his call. At Mavelikara a new lace upper cloth of Magistrate Andy Pillai was nibbled by rats. Swamiji's trial of the case was novel. 'Children, come on,' he said. A large number of rats presented themselves before him. 'Who among you is guilty of having destroyed this upper cloth?' he asked them. A small rat acknowledged the crime by nodding its head. Swamiji ordered some plantains to be brought. He gave each rat a plantain. He admonished them not to repeat the mistake and sent them away happy. There are many in Mavelikkara who bear witness to this incident.

When Swamiji was staying at Irinjalakuda in the house of Thachudaya Kaimal, he was found missing from his room. The room was locked from inside. On a close examination Swamiji was found sticking close to the ceiling like a cockroach. It was believed that he was practising control of breath. On the Ambalapuzha beach he is reported to have dug himself under the sands in one place and emerged at some other

place. On the Malayattur river his disciples are said to have seen Swamiji seated on the surface of the water in Padmasana.

Occasions there were when the forces of nature themselves were known to have yielded to his wish. Edathil Narayana Pillai has this account to give: Once I took Swamiji to Cranganore. It was in the rainy season of the year 1091 (1916 A.D.). On our way back to Parur we were travelling in a small country boat. With us was a friend of mine. The boatman was an inexperienced Christian, Kochu Devassy. When we reached Azhikode backwater, complete darkness enveloped us. High winds and waves rocked the little boat. The boatman lost his bearings and aimlessly punted the boat for a short time. Then in utter desperation he gave up all efforts and sat half dead at the helm. He was stricken with terror and nothing would rouse him from his stupor. My companion and I also were ready to die. Swamiji alone remained unmoved, humming a tune. My friend cried out to Swamiji and bewailed that such a fate should overtake the venerable sage too.

In the meantime the boat was drifting speedily towards the sea. We were not far from the place where the backwater joins the sea. My friend and I prepared ourselves for our last journey, and we called out to Swamiji. Swamiji assured us that there would be no danger. Although we had great faith in his power to work wonders, in the face of the imminent disaster threatening us, we were not reassured, and for ten minutes we remained in an agony of anxiety and suspense. And then there appeared a light. Against the current and the pull of the ebb tide, the boat, with no one directing its movement, reached the front door of the temple at Moothakunnam. It was really a great marvel that the unguided boat drifted against the current and covered a distance of two miles from Azhikode, the place where the Periyar joins the sea, to Moothakunnam temple.

Swamiji was endowed with great physical strength. Puliyanat Padmanabha Pillai of Perumbavur describes an interesting incident which illustrates it. One day a native of Guruvayur named Velappa Menon, who was vain of his prowess in swimming, riding and other outdoor exercises, compelled Swamiji to compete with him in a swimming contest. They were to swim from one side of a large tank to the opposite side and return to the place from where they started. As the tank was very large Swamiji suggested that the race might be restricted to one crossing. But Menon insisted on doing it both ways. The race began with Menon in front and Swamiji following. Swamiji completed the crossing once and as he was half way across on the return journey Menon was floundering in the water without even having reached the opposite bank. He was completely exhausted and beginning to gulp in water. Swamiji then went to his rescue and holding him with one hand swam back to the starting place. The crowd of spectators enjoyed the scene, and Menon hung his head in shame and begged forgiveness of Swamiji.

Siddhas[1] recognize one another. One day Swamiji was taking an evening walk with Thalavadi Krishna Pillai. In the course of the walk one who looked like a mad man approached Swamiji, caressed and saluted him, and shed tears. When the walk was continued the puzzled Krishna Pillai sought from Swamiji an explanation of the

[1] Siddha (siddha): a person of special spiritual accomplishments.

strange scene he had witnessed. Swamiji tried to make light of the incident and evaded an explanation. But on Krishna Pillai's insistence he confided that the stranger was a great *gnani*[1] and *mahatma*,[2] that his *samadhi*[3] was to take place at one o'clock the next day, and the greeting and the tears were an expression of his happiness over the forthcoming event. Next day at the appointed hour the incident happened.

Many are the recorded instances of the miracles Swamiji performed. But they are not to be used as a measure of his spiritual greatness.

Message

Swamiji belonged to the rare band of religious leaders and world benefactors who live a selfless life in the midst of the common people. They master the mysteries of life and disseminate their blessed experiences among the people for their benefit. They set an example for others to follow and they raise the moral and spiritual standards of the society in which they live.

Although his leonine look and his fiery eloquence made him appear like an unassailable fortress to the common man, he was in reality a common man among common men. True, he did not work from an established centre or set forth to serve his fellow beings. But the society and the world that stood aloft in his imagination was a universal family of man without the barriers of caste or creed. Amidst the communal storms that raged around him he stood unmoved and tranquil like the Himalayas. His heart overflowed with love for all created things. He was as guileless as a child and his nature was sweet and gentle. He shunned publicity and the lime light. His ability to pierce the depths of the human mind and discover its closest secrets was unparalleled. He succeeded in enriching the lives of those around him with the treasures of his cultured mind and personality.

With his abundant love for all, he created anew era in spiritual regeneration. The horizon of his love extended to the utmost bounds of creation. The humblest creatures like dogs and ants were his brothers. His greeting of an old friend was this: 'How are our old comrades the ants? Are they still there? That army of dark creatures used to mass themselves around me to share my meal. I used to entertain them all grandly.' He would address his musical instruments affectionately as though they were animate things. Of an old *mridangam*[4] he spoke thus: 'It is long since I have had any news of our old Agastya. This old man has a great longing to see him once more.' *Ahimsa*[5] was an ideal which he worshipped as the highest duty. He detested the killing of animals and the eating of meat. When the cart driver whipped his bullock on the road, Swamiji felt such acute pain himself that he rubbed his own side to relieve the anguish. He would not offer worship at the Devi temple at Cranganore, because he

[1] Gnani (jñāni): a sage, one who has attained ultimate knowledge.

[2] Mahatma (mahātma): a great-hearted one.

[3] Samadhi (samādhi): absorption into the ultimate, often referring to a meditative trance, also used as here to refer to the decease of a spiritually enlightened person.

[4] Mridangam (mṛdaṁgaṁ): a kind of drum.

[5] Ahimsa (ahiṁsa): non-violence.

considered the place a shambles. His endeavour was to re-establish *ahimsa* in a *himsa*-ridden world. He believed that the state of plenitude of *ahimsa* was salvation.

Swamiji sowed the seeds of revolution in the fields of belief and custom in Kerala. He emboldened non-Brahmins to range freely in the prohibited areas of scholarship. He himself learned the sastras of Thanthra and Manthra of which no one had heard, and he helped others to enter these realms of new knowledge. It was his encouragement that enabled Sri Nilakanta Theerthapadar to write *Devarchapaddhathi*. Swamiji also endeavoured to dispel the ignorance of the Malayali in the great truths of Vedanta by his lucid interpretation of them. Few Malayalis have laboured harder than Chattambi Swamigal to enable the people of this country to break the chains of hereditary evil customs, to enhance their self-respect and enrich their lives. He tried to break down the communal barriers that divided people and to instil the ideal of a casteless society. For this he became the target of attack not only of orthodoxy but even of the ordinary members of his own Nayar community. The world was his family. His ideal of a new social structure composed of all mankind united by the bond of love has since his time gained much ground. He shook the people of Kerala out of their moral and mental lethargy and gave them the message of *ahimsa* and universal love.

Maha samadhi

After the *samadhi*[1] of Nilakanta Theerthapadar, Swamiji did not settle down in any particular place. He desired to rest somewhere and continue his studies of ancient manuscripts. But no generous person volunteered to take him in hand and make use of the opportunity for the exercise of his extraordinary talents. The scraps of paper on which he had scribbled matters of great importance got lost in the hands of people who had received them.

One of the resting places of Swamiji during the evening of his life was in Irinjalakuda. Thathampilli Kunjunni Menon and his wife, Minakshi Amma, became his humble disciples and thereafter their house became the congenial meeting place of like minded people. His arrival at Irinjalakuda was a blessing to Thachudaya Kaimal also. This Nayar chief who was installed as the representative of God was one of the principal disciples of Nilakanta Theerthapadar. It was now the responsibility of Kaimal to continue the *Sadguru* magazine begun by Theerthapadar, and Swamigal felt compelled to help him. Under the pen name of 'Agasthyan' he contributed to *Sadguru* articles like 'Sareerathathuva sastram' and 'Desanamangal'.[2] Many prominent people of central Kerala visited Swamiji and received his blessings and advice.

As though to renew his old acquaintance, he visited Ernakulam, Parur, Alwaye, Perumbavur, Vaikam, Alleppey and Mavelikara and reached Karunagappalli. He rested for some days at the residences of Vazhathotathu Velu Pillai and Panmana

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[1] Samadhi (samādhi): decease, see page 121 note 3.

[2] Agasthyan (Agastyan): name of a legendary sage; Sareerathathuva sastram: (śarīratatva śāstraṁ): literally. theory of truth about the human body; Desanamangal (Dēśanāmaṅṅaḷ): 'Place names'.

Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai. While staying at Kumbalath, Swamiji used to spend his time at a neighbouring *sarpakavu*.[1] Sri Sanku Pillai writes:

> There was another kavu to the east of the temple where Swamiji used to rest. He told me one day: 'We must go to that kavu and see it.' Very early next morning he woke me up. If he was afraid of anything it was the heat of the sun, which made him avoid travel by day. So we went to the kavu very early. He said to me: 'This is a very ancient and sacred *kavu*. It would be good to make this place my samadhi.'[2]
>
> A few days later he started for Trivandrum. 'I shall return after bidding farewell to all,' he said. As he started he told me, '*Karanavar*,[3] the old man will come back here to die.' (He used to call me '*Karanavar*' affectionately in the presence of others.)

Sanku Pillai was one of Swamiji's greatest sishyas in his last days. It was not surprising that this spirited and dutiful young man should be the apple of his eye. Swamiji used to call him his '*ponninkudam*'[4] (darling). And Kumbalam worshipped him. Although he does not claim to have received any message or divine advice from him, he deemed it a great blessing to be in Swamiji's presence.

All the infirmities of old age now attacked Swamiji's body which the practices of yoga had made very strong. He had frequent bouts of diarrhoea and he realized that his end was near. He reminded his disciples that all the ills that the flesh is destined to endure have to be endured before the soul would secure its release. His disciples Theerthapada Paramahamsa Swamigal and Padmanabha Panicker remained solicitously attending on him. Although he could command every convenience and the best medical aid at Trivandrum, Swamiji desired to return to Panmana. He informed Kumbalam of his wish.

As soon as he received the letter, Kumbalam arrived at Trivandrum with a boat. As the boat moved from the jetty at Chakkai, he told his disciples. 'I shall not be able to see the sun in Edavam (June).' As he stroked his stately beard and bade farewell to his native place and his comrades, the band of his admirers greeted him for the last time with bowed heads.

On the way, Kumbalam insisted on Swamiji resting for some days in the bungalow at Thottuvayal in Prakulam. People thronged to Thottuvayal on hearing the news of his illness. Ignoring his old age, Sri Narayanaguru Swamigal came to Swamiji and enquired after his health. The scene is thus described by Kottinattu Narayana Pillai:

> Sri Narayana Guru Swamigal arrived at Thottuvayal. Sri Chattambi Swamigal was lying in a sofa in a room on the first floor. He insisted on his visitor sitting on the sofa. We watched the scene of this great meeting with interest. The lively and high flown discussion of this trinity (including Theerthapada Paramahamsa Swamigal) lasting for two and a half hours enthralled us. Sri Narayana Gu-

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[1] Sarpakavu (sarppakāvŭ): a kāvŭ is an area of sacred ground kept free of cultivation. A sarppakāvŭ is specifically sacred to snakes.

[2] Samadhi (samādhi): place where mortal remains of a spiritual person are interred.

[3] Karanavar (Kāraṇavar): a term of respect for a Nāyar family elder.

[4] Ponninkudam (ponninkuṭam): literally, 'pot of gold'.

> ruswamigal gladly accepted Swamiji's suggestion that he should rest there that night and leave only the next day. In order not to disturb Swamiji we went at night to the adjoining room. Swamigal told Sri Narayana Guruswamigal that the title of Asan's *Karuna* would strike one as appropriate if one were to hear the poem recited by Pannisseri Nanu Pillai. He then called upon Nanu Pillai to recite the poem. The new way in which the poem was rendered pleased every one greatly. The meeting of the divinely gifted personages and their followers was a rare occasion and it took us far into the night.

Compelled by his disciples Swamiji agreed to have a photograph of himself taken on that day. To pose for a photograph, to speak at public meetings, to write to the press, to accept the leadership of any movement – these were distasteful to him. In response to the wish of others he had for the first time agreed to pose for a photograph on his sixtieth birthday. For the second and the last time in his life he now allowed himself to be photographed. On either side of him sat Srinarayana Guruswamigal and Theerthapada Paramahamsa Swamigal.

Swamiji wanted to live quietly in a quiet place. He therefore insisted on going to Panmana. He reached Panmana by boat. In a short time he made the C.P.P. Reading Room his refuge. Even when his condition had begun to cause anxiety, he maintained his high spirits and cheerfulness. One day Sri Thayyil Krishna Pillai went into the reading room. The doors were closed and Swamiji was alone inside. Below his cot lay coiled a yellow *chera* and near it a big frog was sitting quite unperturbed. When Krishna Pillai told Swamiji about them he said. 'If you open the door for them they will go out.' As Krishna Pillai opened the door, the snake slowly unwound itself and crept out and the frog hopped after it. Swamiji commented. 'They come to me wherever I am. You are not my only friends.'

It was at this time that the Vaikam Satyagraha[1] was being conducted. Swamiji's interest in following the daily newspaper reports of the campaign was unequalled. He had great faith in Satyagraha. He was of the view that what was wanted was a temple entry Satyagraha. (At Vaikam the Satyagraha was for the use of the road round the temple walls by the untouchables.) Swamiji was full of praise for Messrs K.P. Kesava Menon, George Joseph, A.K. Pillai, T.K. Madhavan, Chittezhath Sanku Pillai and Chathukutti Nair for their sufferings and sacrifices. One morning, pointing to the portrait of Gandhiji and reverently folding his hands he said: 'He is one of the great men now living. The picture makes it clear that his greatness will shine even more brightly in the years to come.'

Many people used to come to see Swamiji and invite him to their places. On Medam, 20, 1099 (1924) two of his admirers met him and insisted that he should go to Quilon. Unable to turn down their request he said: 'Any way wait till after the 23rd. Then I will come south.' ('To go south' also means to die). That evening he called Sanku Pillai and asked him. 'Karanavar, if this old man dies here what will you do?' 'Everything will happen as it should with your blessings' replied Sanku Pillai. Next day he expressed his desire to have a *panka*[2] in his room. Sanku Pillai immediately instructed Sri Thayyil Krishna Pillai to have the *panka* fixed up. But there was delay

[1] Satyagraha (satyāgraha): a kind of non-violent protest made famous by Mahatma Gandhi.

[2] Panka (paṅka): fan.

and on the 23rd morning Swamiji said: 'I am not destined to enjoy the breeze from the *panka*.' Those who heard the remark understood it as a reference to his proposed trip to Quilon that day.

Several people came to the reading room to have a *darsan*[1] of Swamiji. He received all of them with his usual graciousness and he prepared all of them to return to their places before the afternoon. About noon a *Ginjira* player arrived. Swamiji made him play on the instrument and later he himself played for some time. Altogether he was more cheerful and in higher spirits than usual. In the afternoon Sanku Pillai and some others were sitting in the pandal in front of the reading room. Swamigal was alone in his room. A few moments after they heard the clock strike three, they heard Swamiji saying something in his room. Sri Thayyil Krishna Pillai went in. Swamiji said: 'Call Panicker, I want to sit up.' Krishna Pillai at once brought in Panicker. Together they helped him to sit up. He himself twisted his legs. His eyes turned upward and slowly they began to close. In about an hour they were closed completely. Fearing that Swamigal was worse than usual Sanku Pillai came frequently to the door and inquired how he was. Krishna Pillai and Panicker did not realize that Swamiji was entering his Samadhi. They therefore continued to reply to Sanku Pillai that Swamiji was all right. It was only when he remained completely inert for a time that they understood the truth.

Swamigal had entered eternal rest. Hearing the news people from different places came to Panmana to pay their last respects to the departed saint. At noon the next day his mortal remains were embalmed and entombed in the *kavu*. Tributes were paid to the modern Sankaracharya by the press, the poets and admirers of all communities. Laudatory verses were published in book form. Among the poets who paid their tributes were Vallathol and Ullur.

Memorials

Swamiji's disciples wanted to raise a memorial to immortalize his name. He had expressed the desire to install the idol of Siva on the *Samadhi Peetham*.[2] Thanks to the efforts of Sri Sanku Pillai, a temple was built and the image of Siva installed on the Mahasamadhi tomb on 3rd Meenam 1106 (1931). The temple is named Sri Balabhattarakeswara Kshetram.

The place which is of great scenic beauty has now become a centre of pilgrimage. On the National Highway, about ten miles north of Quilon is a smiling village named Edappallikotta. From Edappallikotta a small road runs through the green shady countryside. If you walk for about a mile along this road, you reach the site of Swamiji's memorial at Panmana. It stands on a slightly elevated ground with a few small tiled buildings by its side. Sri Sanku Pillai has made one of them his permanent residence. At the entrance to this site you are greeted by the statue of a boy in the act of removing a thorn from his foot, erected on the top of a stone pillar. By its side is a small building called Mahatmaji Mandir which is now used as a reception house. To

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[1] Darsan (darśana): sight.

[2] Samadhi Peetham (samādhi pīṭhaṁ): the raised platform of the tomb.

the north of this building is the Sri Balabhattarakeswara temple. A small *srikoil*,[1] a tiny *mandapam*, the *santigraha* and the *oottupura* are situated by its side. The spreading mango trees, the jasmine flowers starring the ground, the *chemparuthi* blossoms waving joyfully in the breeze, the singing *kuyils*[2] and the dancing temple peacock – all these make the place a veritable rural paradise. And a perfect tranquillity prevails over the whole area.

The deity installed in the temple is Siva. Inside the *santhigraha* is the portrait of Chattambi Swamigal with the words inscribed in large letters 'MAHASAMADHI – 1099'. A walking stick and a *ginjira* which belonged to Swamiji are kept in the *srikoil*. The place is a veritable Santiniketan, the abode of peace.

The temple and the *asram* by its side attract thousands of devotees every year. Mahatma Gandhi visited the asram in February 1934 and spent two days (19th and 20th) in meditation and *bhajan*[3] there. The cottage specially erected for his stay is still preserved under the name of 'Mahatmaji Mandir'. Among other distinguished persons who have been attracted to the place by its sanctity are Sri Sankar Rao Dev, Sardar K.M. Panicker, Sri A.G. Thacker and Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali.

There are several institutions founded to perpetuate the memory of Swamiji. The most prominent among them are the Vidyadhiraja College, Vazhoor; the Chattambi Swami Memorial Abheda-Asramam, Trivandrum; and the Chattambi Swami Memorial School, Panmana.

The silver jubilee of Swami's Mahasamadhi was celebrated in 1124 M.E. (1949). In 1954 Swamiji's birth centenary was celebrated in Panmana Asram in a fitting manner and the function was inaugurated by His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore. On both occasions souvenirs containing poems and essays on Swamiji's life and achievements and on religious topics were published. The innumerable admirers of Swamiji feel that memorials commensurate with his eminence have not yet been raised. Efforts are therefore being made to collect adequate funds to put up an auditorium and to start a public library on the premises of the Panmana Asram, where facilities for research in different branches of knowledge, with special emphasis on Indian culture and philosophy could be provided.

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[1] Srikoil (śrīkōvil): temple sanctuary; mandapam (maṇḍapaṁ): pavilion; santigraha (śāntigraha): a small structure built to purify the temple site; oottupura (ūṭṭupura): place in a temple etc. where people are fed.

[2] Kuyil (kuyil): the koyel bird.

[3] Bhajan (bhajan): worship.

Conclusion

The process of modernization

As it has been presented in this book, modernization is a process of growth in society's capacity to transmit, develop and use new culture – so that society moves from a state of traditional civilization, in which culture is received largely from previous generations, to the more fluid and dynamic state of the modern world, in which more and more culture is received from contemporary developments and discoveries. This process of modernization can be characterized by four major factors: communications, organization, education and self-reliance.

First, the *development of communications* enables the contemporary transmission of new information and discoveries. All large civilizations have had to develop roads and transportation to expand and hold themselves together, and the resulting communications of travel and trade enabled the growth of traditional civilizations like those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, India, Persia, Greece, Rome, medieval Europe, Islam, Africa, and South America. However, the use of printed publication in the countries of Europe enabled a new kind of civilization, which started in medieval Europe far below the level of many other contemporary civilizations, but which grew to dominate and lead other civilizations in the development of our present world. This new kind of civilization can I think rightly be called 'modern'. In its initial development in Europe and in its spread elsewhere, I would place its start with the introduction of printing, which, as I have tried to show in this book, leads to a major change in the way society organizes and develops culture. After printing, further developments in communications technology – in particular the telephone, radio, the cinema, television and other electronic media – have increased the tendency of communications to reach out beyond local and national borders, so that cultural traditions are no longer the sole property of the locality or nation from which they come, but increasingly pass on to a growing international public connected by modern media.

Second, the *growth of organizations* using modern media co-ordinates constructive activity and thus builds up the margin of resources required to explore, try out and apply new culture. Traditional civilizations built up a certain level of organization, as for example the mandarin bureaucracy of imperial China, classical Indian centres of learning like Taxila and Nalanda, the city-state councils of classical Greece and the administrative achievements of the Roman empire. But one has only to compare mandarin bureaucracy with modern bureaucracy, or Taxila and Nalanda with modern universities, or Greek city-states with modern democracies, or Roman administration with modern government to realize that even at its best the traditional world could not sustain anything like the growth and extent of established organizations which modern communications have made quite commonplace today. Modernization thus involves a tremendous growth of organizations, like bureaucracies, governments, political parties, commercial corporations, professional and other associations, institutes of various kinds, schools and universities; and such organizations are clearly important instruments of modern industrial and economic prosperity and of modern social and cultural development.

Third, the *spread of education* through modern media and organization greatly widens the social base of intelligent capabilities required to think through, understand and use new culture. In traditional civilizations, a relatively small elite received education, through instruction in the classics handed over from teacher to pupil; but this classical system of education could neither reach out to wide classes of people throughout society nor accommodate and promote constructive change in the way that modern education can, given the extended reach of modern media and the organized flexibility of modern institutions to develop and propagate new ideas.

Fourth, a change of emphasis towards *independence and self-reliance* encourages people to think for themselves, thus using their education to try the new possibilities and take the new opportunities of an increasingly dynamic world. Traditional society depended on a gradually developed, slow-changing order that was handed over from generation to generation, and hence traditional civilizations naturally emphasized obedience to the authority of this established order. Of course there were pockets of independent-minded questioning that were vital to the growth and life of their respective traditions, as for example in the city states of classical Greece and among the ascetic and philosophical cults of India. But free-thinking individualism could never be developed into a widespread ethic of sustained social order until printing and subsequent communications brought the flexibility of extensive organization and the level of general education that enable modern, democratic society to keep reconsidering its order and its culture to an extent unthinkable in traditional times.

India and the West

In both India and the West, we can distinguish three main layers of cultural tradition: corresponding to 'classical', 'medieval' and 'modern' phases of civilization. At the bottom is the 'classical' layer of tradition, corresponding to the civilizations that produced the Greek and Roman classics of the Western tradition and the Sanskrit, Tamil and Islamic classics of the Indian tradition. Each of these classical civilizations reached a peak of expansion and development after which coherence and energy were lost; and hence there followed 'medieval' periods of political disintegration and instability during which a number of regional or 'vernacular' traditions were formed on the basis of classical learning. In Europe, vernacular traditions of regional languages like French and English were formed by gradually assimilating the intellectual development of Greek and Latin classics; and, in India, vernacular traditions like those of Malayalam and Hindi were formed by assimilating Sanskrit, Tamil and Islamic learning.

Hence we have a second, 'vernacular' layer of tradition developed in medieval periods of regional formation, and here is where India and the West have significantly diverged in their pattern of development. The medieval phase of Indian civilization started when the 'golden age' of the Gupta empire gave way in the seventh century A.D. to the post-Gupta period of political disunity, with the result, over the next twelve centuries or so, that the Hindu kingdoms and empires of India were invaded and partly dominated by Islamic rulers like the sultans and the Moghuls, who brought Arabic and Persian classicism to join with classical Hinduism in forming new regional cultures. Since India's Islamic invaders offset the initial destruction they caused by bringing and assimilating civilization, and since traditional Hindu kingdoms and empires continued throughout the medieval period despite the Islamic domination of

large parts of India, medieval India did not suffer from nearly such major destruction and discontinuity of civilization as Europe suffered in the dark ages, after the Roman empire collapsed in the fifth century A.D. Thus the classical development of tradition in India maintained its continuity into vernacular, regional developments to a far greater extent than in Europe, where civilization had to rise from the ashes of the Roman empire to reach a renaissance that came nine centuries later.

With the flowering of the renaissance in fifteenth century Europe, the introduction of printing began the process of modernization; and over the next several hundred years the vernacular regions of Europe developed the communications, organization, education and self-reliance that made them coherent, powerful nations extending their new kind of rule over the rest of the world. During this period when European nations were forming and moving into a new, 'modern' phase of civilization, India remained in its medieval phase, its politics and society divided and disturbed, but its culture continuing an ancient, unbroken classical tradition by now developing a popular aspect in vernacular languages and traditions.

As I have tried to argue in this book, before printing and subsequent communications a developed system of learning was dependent on a intensive study of the relatively few texts and cultural forms that could personally be handed down from teacher to pupil and hence from generation to generation. These relatively few, intensively studied texts and cultural forms were what we call 'classic', and they were intended to pass on a wealth of knowledge and experience through the intensive training of a few pupils under a personal teacher. Thus, by its very nature before modern communications, classical learning could only spread by intensive personal training; so of necessity it spread only slowly, within a small elite, and it could not extend very far without breaking up into regional disparity. This is one major reason why classical periods of unified development and expansion were followed by medieval periods of disunity and regional development. Traditional empires and civilizations simply did not have the communications technology required to hold together beyond a certain point of expansion, and when they split up into conflict and instability they left behind in each region a relatively small, classically educated elite of rulers and teachers who continued the classical traditions of learning and helped develop regional, vernacular culture among a much more numerous, uneducated populace.

This was the situation of medieval India. There, as empires and kingdoms lost unity and effectiveness, the focus of cultural development shifted away from the intellectual classicism of the courts, towards a popular fervour of religious devotion that spoke in the common vernacular its message of mystic withdrawal from an unhappy world. All over India, religious saints led widespread devotional cults, fervently calling on ordinary people in their own vernacular languages to turn away from the miseries of a troubled world and give the devotion of their hearts to God. Devotional songs were composed and widely sung, and the great epics of classical literature were retold with new devotional emphasis in various vernacular versions, thus founding the growth of vernacular literatures that now rose from the level of folk tradition to start assimilating and developing the knowledge of classical learning.

Then, as the vernacular cultures of India were thus in the process of developing themselves on the model of classical systems, the rule of the British brought political stability, the growth of modern communications and a stimulating influx of new culture from the West, resulting in a renaissance of the Indian tradition in the nine-

teenth and twentieth centuries. This book has been mainly concerned with this Indian renaissance. The historical records here reproduced all date from this period when the use of printing to spread and develop classical knowledge marked the beginning of a modernization in the Indian tradition, as a similar renaissance had marked the beginning of modernization in Europe four hundred years before.

Hence India and the West have differently entered a 'modern' phase of civilization, in which printing and subsequent communications bring regional and national traditions together in the development of a 'modern' layer of cultural tradition. Where India, like other oriental civilizations, has rather suddenly begun to modernize in the last century or so, the West has been modernizing much more gradually since the introduction of printing five hundred years ago, starting from the relatively low level of civilization in medieval, pre-renaissance Europe. Accordingly, where the Western tradition and its contribution to the modern world are relatively clear and easy to understand today, having had five hundred years to be developed and presented in modern terms, Indian and oriental traditions are still largely expressed in terms appropriate to the medieval societies from which they have so recently emerged.

Unfortunately, I suggest, this remaining medieval manner of oriental traditions is all too easily confused with their basic content. Thus, a historical difference in the manner of expression is often misinterpreted to indicate a basic opposition between East and West: identifying oriental culture with medieval extremes of traditional attitudes like hierarchy, holism, fatalism, asceticism and mysticism, where Western culture is identified with opposing modern attitudes like democracy, individualism, self-reliance, acceptance of the world and independent-minded reason.

However, if we take a historical perspective, I think it becomes clearer that such opposing attitudes belong more to the process of modernization than to basic, unchanging values of oriental and Western traditions. For, if we go back to medieval Europe before the introduction of printing, we find that hierarchical values were emphasized in the feudal system and the Christian church; holism was emphasized in the unified, hierarchical world view of macrocosm and microcosm functioning under the sole, over-reaching dominion of God; fatalism was emphasized in the acceptance of divine providence and predestination; asceticism was emphasized in powerful monastic orders and in widely preached virtues of forbearance and restraint; and mysticism was emphasized in the ecstatic experiences of Christian saints and in the metaphysical doctrines of religious scholasticism.

I would argue that these medieval values were extreme forms of traditional attitudes required to maintain and transmit culture in a fragmented, unstable world. In particular, hierarchical authority was required to give maximum resources and leadership to the small elites who maintained knowledge and culture; holistic general statements were favoured because communications were lacking to transmit much by way of individual differentiation, fatalistic acceptance was required in a troubled world to maintain obedience to traditional rule and faith in God; ascetic withdrawal was favoured to pursue knowledge and culture that was not easily available in society at large; and mystical pronouncement was favoured over common reason because education was so little spread.

The difference between medieval Europe before the start of the European renaissance in the fourteenth century and medieval India before the start of the Indian renaissance in the nineteenth century, I would further argue, is that medieval India had a longer, more complete accumulation of tradition than medieval Europe – whose

classical base had been so largely destroyed when Rome collapsed. Hence, with more culture to maintain in analogous circumstances of political fragmentation and instability, pre-nineteenth century Hinduism developed medieval extremes to a further degree than medieval Europe: in particular through the ritualized hierarchy of caste, the doctrinal holism of Hindu metaphysical cosmology, the world-weary fatalism of karma and reincarnation, the spectacular asceticism of sannyāsi cults, and the transcendental mysticism of yogis and Indian saints.

Such evident extremes tend to strike us so hard that at first we often take them for the basic content of the Indian tradition. But I think that this is a mistake, as I have tried to suggest in this book through historical records of Indians who are clearly not discarding the knowledge in their tradition, but going more deeply into it. In the process, the tradition has been taking on new forms of life: as it develops away from ossified medieval extremes of caste hierarchy, holistic authoritarianism, fatalistic dependence, ascetic withdrawal and mystical pronouncement, towards more flexible modern values of human equality, independent-minded individualism, self-reliant effort, constructive action and reasoned knowledge.

To avoid misunderstanding on a much debated subject, I should attempt to clarify the above argument a little. I am not trying to say that sociologists like Max Weber and Louis Dumont are wrong when they show us how traditional Indian society was organized through an ideology emphasizing holistic and hierarchical values represented by individual persons and social groups. Nor am I trying to say that students of mysticism and religion are wrong when they point out the extensive use of asceticism, yoga and fatalism in traditional India. My argument is rather that such sociologists of tradition and students of mysticism and religion tell us more about a traditional manner of expression which belongs to the past than they tell us about the underlying knowledge which has been developed in the Indian tradition and which now needs to be expressed in modern terms.

In particular, let us consider the philosophical centre of the Indian tradition, which is so often taken to be basically mystical and religious, in opposition to the empirical rationalism of the West. I simply do not agree that Indian philosophy fundamentally favoured either mysticism or religion at the expense of reasoning based upon common experience; and I suggest that where mystical and religious expression were used to express philosophical truth, this was so because of the historical circumstances in which the tradition was developed and used.

The earliest texts of explicit philosophy in India are the Upanishads, which centre upon rather bare, aphoristic pronouncements of truths conceived to have been seen by men of profound perception. At the time when the Upanishads were composed (around the sixth century B.C.), the classical intellectual tradition of India was just beginning to form and the educated ability to reason was little developed in society. As a result, the aphorisms of the Upanishads were at first relatively little explained and elaborated in intellectual terms, emphasizing rather their allegorical illustration and their use as mantras for exercises of mental concentration and meditation.

A mantra, I should explain, is a chanted sequence of words whose repetition (either aloud or in the mind) is conceived to produce a direct mental effect through the shapes of chanted sound, rather in the way that music has a direct effect on the mind through the shapes of its melodies and harmonies. Hence, in addition to analysing its intellectual meaning, a mantra could also be used in an exercise of mental concentra-

tion that consisted in repeating the mantra over and over again in order to induce a special state of mind influenced by the shape of the chanted words.

In aphoristic statements of the Upanishads, like 'Ahaṁ brahmāsmi' ('I am brahman')[1], there are thus two aspects: of reasoned enquiry and mental power. In the first aspect, the statements raise reflective questions, towards the discernment of common truth. In the second aspect, the statements are repeated as mantras, in exercises of mental concentration meant to induce special states of mind where the truths expressed by the aphorisms can be more easily seen. This latter aspect may be called 'mystical', in the sense that it does not reason from common experience, but instead proceeds through special states that are associated with a sense of mystery and strangeness. In many parts of the Upanishads, such a mystical approach is obvious and strikes us hard at first; but I would argue that the more relevant feature of the Upanishads is that they developed an early, if still allegorical and aphoristic, use of reason where ritual and mystical techniques had previously prevailed.

In fact, as the Indian intellectual tradition developed in extended period of classical civilization following the composition of the Upanishads, the aphoristic pronouncements of the Upanishads were further and further reasoned and explained in abstract intellectual terms, culminating in the classic, highly reasoned philosophy of Shri Shankara, currently dated around the eighth century A.D.

After Shri Shankara came India's medieval period, in which the philosophical tradition expanded its social application beyond educated classical elites that now increasingly lost political cohesion and social effectiveness. This expansion of philosophical teaching, to wider classes of society, was achieved by a shift of emphasis: away from the classic intellectual aspect of the tradition, and towards the development of popular religion. The fragmentation and decadence of medieval times often caused popular religion to seek escape into other-worldly fantasy and to withdraw backwards into asceticism and mysticism. That may often have been appropriate to the times; but, with this medieval period only recently passed and with its attitudes of escape and withdrawal still hanging over much of present India, I think we should be very careful to distinguish such decadent attitudes at the periphery of recent medieval popularization from the underlying knowledge at the centre of the Indian tradition.

In fact, despite the decadence of the medieval period, Shri Shankara's Vedānta philosophy, with its emphasis on knowledge, was maintained in a central, though esoteric position in the tradition; as was tellingly brought home to me when my host in Kerala quoted a stanza from Shri Shankara's *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇī*,[2] translating it to the effect that while the greatest way to truth is devotion (bhakti), the devotion of the intelligent is to enquire into the essential reality of experience.

Hence, as I see it, the Indian tradition has centred upon Shri Shankara's classic systematization of Vedānta philosophy, which fundamentally emphasized knowledge (jñāna) above mysticism (yoga) and religious devotion (deva bhakti). In its classical context, the reasoned philosophy of Vedānta was still somewhat esoteric, because it could only be available to the classically educated elites of traditional society. In the

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[1] 'Brahman' means 'all-comprehensive reality'; or, in other words, 'that which includes everything in the universe'.

[2] moksha-sādhana-sāmagryām bhaktir eva garīyasī
svasvarūpānusandhānam bhaktir ity abhidhīyate *(stanza 31)*

medieval period, though Vedānta philosophy retained its position as the established centre of orthodox tradition, its classic intellectual aspect became more esoteric with the increasing fragmentation and isolation of classically educated elites; so that the main thrust of philosophy turned towards the development of popular religion, as an imaginative way of devotion to an ultimate philosophical truth represented by the appealing forms of various gods.

Viewed thus, the intellectual esotericism of Indian philosophy and the mysticism of its popular religious expression do not result so much from its basic content as from the narrow spread of educated reason in traditional society; which in turn would indicate that, far from requiring description in mystical or religious terms, the Indian philosophical tradition now needs to be understood through the approach of common, independent-minded reason which today we are able to emphasize throughout society as a result of modern communications and the spread of education.

It is quite true that Indian philosophy has always looked for a truth that is ultimately beyond reason; but this search does not imply, as is commonly supposed, a turning back from empirical reason to mysticism or religion. What is meant rather is something which has come to strike us more and more in our modern use of knowledge: that reasoning is a symbolic process which leads to understanding only when one sees through the symbols of reason and realizes the experience they represent. In the same sort of way, the Indian tradition has looked upon reason not as knowledge itself but as a direct means to knowledge. In this conception, the knowledge sought is beyond all symbols – very definitely including the seductive symbols of mysticism and religion, as well as those of reason. And the reflective reasoning of true philosophy is seen to have an inherent advantage. From its very start, it turns its questioning back upon its own symbols, on the way down to an underlying truth of experience from where all symbols draw whatever meaning and value they express.

However, if the basic content of Indian and other oriental traditions is not just hierarchical holism and ascetic mysticism or fatalistic religion, then what do oriental traditions have basically to tell us and how do we understand them in the modern world?

Where the West has longer used physical media like printing to develop knowledge of the external world, I suggest that India and the orient have concentrated longer on the more subtle knowledge of mind and human resources that is less easily transmitted through external media and requires more personal contact to learn and pass on. Hence oriental traditions should have a substantial contribution to make in the area of human science and humanities: in medicine, psychology, social and cultural science, religion, literature, art and philosophy. But, while this contribution is beginning to be felt, I think it is still largely blocked and distorted by a narrow conception of knowledge too rigidly tied to the external media that have so spectacularly transformed our world. In trying to understand traditional knowledge and culture, we are led to ask questions about our own conception of knowledge and culture, and it is to such questions that I now finally wish to turn.

Knowledge, culture and tradition

In the course of this study I have been very much troubled by our lack of a sufficient conception of knowledge and culture. I feel that we identify knowledge and culture too literally with the forms that media transmit: in particular we identify knowledge

too literally with techniques and theories like those of physical technology and science, and we identify culture too literally with symbolic arrangements like those of language or games or art. The trouble with such literal identification is that techniques and theories and symbolic arrangements are all forms that are liable to change when a tradition comes to the modern world. What then is the basis of change, and how is tradition continued in new cultural forms?

Surely tradition can continue in some more profound way than by changing as little as possible, merely adding refinements and adjustments to basically unchanging traditional forms. That was the medieval way of continuing tradition with often unseeing formality in a declined and backward-looking world. Today we question tradition far more and we are much more capable of developing new cultural forms for ourselves. But we develop new forms through knowledge, and a good part of our knowledge comes from tradition, whether by questioning or accepting traditional forms. Hence, I would argue, what really continues tradition is knowledge, which persists and develops through changing cultural forms.

If knowledge persists when the forms that convey it change, there must be something more to knowledge than form; and that something, I suggest, is called 'understanding', on which cultural forms depend for their meaning and use. But how then does understanding work? To answer this question we have to consider not merely the differing forms of knowledge, but also our common experience of how we know the world.

We get to know the world in three different ways: we act, we think and we feel. When we act we confront the objects of knowledge, thus applying and testing what we understand; when we think we consider how objects relate, thus instructing action and seeking further to understand; and when we feel we react from within ourselves to objects and thoughts, thus intuitively expressing what we understand. Hence knowledge can be practical, intellectual and emotional, and these three different aspects of knowledge are connected through the understanding with which each of them is concerned. The practical knowledge of action applies understanding to produce results; the intellectual knowledge of thought develops understanding, directing action and considering its results; and the emotional knowledge of feeling expresses understanding, directing both action and thought by an intuitive response to objects and ideas.

Feeling can be separated from theory and practice if we confine ourselves to knowledge of the physical world. Physical theory can be applied and tested through physical techniques with minimal dependence on feeling, and the more difficult question of how to discover effective theories and techniques can be left to the special intuitive feelings of scientists' and technologists' minds. However, if we consider our knowledge of human beings, then the situation is rather different, for in our practical dealings with human beings we are concerned not merely with physical objects but also with thoughts and feelings. Feeling is an essential part of human practice, and our practical knowledge of human beings does not come merely from theoretical predictions and instructions but also, more deeply, from feelings expressing the understanding that theory and thought have led towards.

Thus, in order to make room for a human knowledge that matches our spectacularly developed physical technology and science, I suggest that we need to broaden our concept of practical and theoretical knowledge to include an emotional aspect of knowledge as well. The usual objection to such a broadened concept of knowledge is

that it then becomes too nebulous and vague, but I think this objection can be overcome by developing our concepts of culture and tradition.

Culture, I would argue, is the concrete expression of knowledge in society, and knowledge thus expressed is developed and defined through tradition. More specifically, culture is the means by which knowledge is conveyed and presented, using three different kinds of form: practical forms like tools and techniques, intellectual forms like concepts and theories, and emotional forms like expressions of feeling and symbols of value. Knowledge is achieved by learning to use such forms, partly through one's own experience and partly from those who have passed them on. Hence knowledge passes on and develops through the use of cultural forms; and when cultural forms are accumulated into a system of usage that defines the terms of reference in a continuing cultural community, then such a definitive system of historical usage is called a tradition.

Just as language has been quite clearly and usefully studied as a way of conveying and representing knowledge, through practical techniques of phonetics and grammar, intellectual concepts of vocabulary and semantics, and emotional expressions of idiom and style, all of which are developed and defined on the basis of historical usage; so also I suggest we can equally clearly and usefully take the view that culture in general conveys and represents knowledge through practical, intellectual and emotional means which are developed and defined, not merely in technical terms, but more basically by the experienced usage of historical tradition.

We tend to forget that our physical technology and science are no more than successfully established traditions, and therefore we often look narrowly backwards in a quite inappropriate medieval way that would limit all knowledge to our established traditions of technology and science. Should we not also look forward, in a more appropriate modern way, and broaden our minds to make room for the knowledge that Indian and oriental traditions have just begun to contribute to our world?

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